2. PADMA PURANA

SRISHTI-KHAND

Having revealed the contents of all the Puranas to his son Ugrashrava, Sage Lomaharshan instructed him to go to 'Naimisharanya' and spread it among the sages doing penance over there.

There is an interesting tale how this sacrosanct forest of Naimish derived its name --

Once, the sages sought Lord Vishnu's help in finding a suitable place, where they could perform their religious activities unhindered. Lord Vishnu released his chakra and instructed them to follow it. 'This chakra had many circumferences (Nemi) and all of you can commence your penance at the place where one of them gets detached from the chakra' ---said Lord Vishnu.

The Sages followed the chakra as per the instruction of Lord Vishnu. Once of the circumferences of chakra got detached and fell at a place called Gangavarta. In course of time this particular place was famous as 'Naimish' because the term 'Nemi' in Sanskrit means circumference. When Ugrashrava who was popularly known as 'Suta' reached 'Naimisharnya' all the sages received him with enlighten all the sages on the divine tales of Padma Purana.

Suta replied--- Padma Purana consists of five sections and fifty-five thousand shlokas. The names of these sections are Srishti-Khand, Bhumi-Khand, Swarg Khand, Patal Khand and Uttam-Khand. The tales of Padma Purana praise the glory of Lord Vishnu. These tales were narrated to Lord Brahma by Lord Vishnu himself, who in turn propagated them in this world through various sages.

THE BEGINNING OF CREATION

The Sages requested Suta to narrate about the incident when sage Pulastya had met Bhishma. Suta replied— Bhishma was doing penance at a place called Gangadwar. Being pleased by his austere penance, Lord Brahma instructed Pulastya to go to Gangadwar and bless Bhishma.

After reaching there, Pulastya told Bhishma that Lord Brahma was pleased by his penance. 'Ask any boon you wish for' said Pulastya. Bhishma thanked his good fortune of getting a chance to meet Sage Pulastya. He requested Pulastya to reveal how Lord Brahma had created the world.

Pulastya replied— During the initial phase of his creation, Lord Brahma created the Mahattatva first of all. After that he created the three types of Ego from the Mahattatva—Satva, Rajas and Tamas. These three types of Ego are the origins of all the five sense-organs, organs of action and all the five basic elements—space, water, fire, air and earth.

An enormous egg came into existence with the permutation and combination of these five basic elements. Within this egg exists the whole universe including the mountains, islands, oceans, planets, deities, demons and the human beings. The layers of water, fire, air, space and darkness envelop this enormous egg. These elements are once again covered by the 'Mahattatva', which in turn is enveloped by the 'Prakriti' (nature). Lord Vishnu himself does creation in the form of Lord Brahma and also takes various incarnations to protect the mankind. At the end of the Kalpa, it is only He, who annihilates in the form of Rudra. After the end of Kalpa, he takes rest on the back of Sheshnag for the full period of deluge.

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BRAHMA'S LIFESPAN AND CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER OF THE'ERAS'

Pulastya says—Lord Brahma, the embodiment of Lord Vishnu has a lifespan of one hundred years. His lifespan is also called 'Par', and half of

its period is known as 'Parardha'. One 'Kashtha' consists of 15 Nimesha while a Kala consists of 30 'Kashthas'. A muhurta consists of 30 Kalas. The periods of 30 muhurtas are equal to one day and Night of the human beings. A month of this world is equivalent to 30 days and nights. Six months make an 'Ayan' and a year consists of two 'Ayans'. These two 'Ayans' are also known by two other names—Dakshainayan and Uttarayan. Dakshainayan is the night of the deities where as Uttarayan is their day.

Four yugas are equivalent to twelve thousand years of the deities, which occur in a cyclic order— -Satya Yuga, Treta Yuga, Dwapar Yuga and Kali Yuga. The periods of these yugas are as follows—

Satya Yuga- 4000 years. Treta Yuga - 3000 years. Dwapar Yuga- 2000 years. Kali Yuga- 1000 years. Total - 10,000 years.

Each yuga is followed by the hibernation periods of Sandhya and Sandhyansh, which are as follows—Sandhya, Sandhyansh

Satya Yuga 400, 400. Treta Yuga 300, 300. Dwapar Yuga 200, 200. Kali Yuga 100, 100. Total 1000 years 1000 years.

Four yuga are collectively known as 'Chaturyuga'. A Brahma's day consists of one-thousand such 'Chaturyugas'. Altogether, fourteen Manu appear during this whole period of 1000 Chaturgas or in other words a day of Lord Brahma. Each 'Manvantar' is named after a Manu and is equivalent to little more than 71 Chaturyugas. It also has its own Indra, Saptarishis and other deities. This way, a manvantar is also equivalent to 8,52,000 years of the deities or divine years. Going by the standard of the years of this world a manvantar is equivalent to 30,67,20,000 years. On the basis of the years of this world, a Brahma's day is equivalent to 30,67,20,000 x 14 = 4,29,40,80,000 years. This is the period after which a Brahma's day is over and a deluge takes place when all the three worlds becomes devoid of life due to unbearable heat. Lord Brahma then takes rest for the same period (4,29,40,80,000 years) which is his night.

After the night is over, Lord Brahma again commences his creation. So, this process continues for the whole period of Brahma's life span, i.e. 100 years." Bhisma requested Sage Pulastya to describe how Lord Brahma

created life in the beginning of the present Kalpa.

Pulastya replied— At the end of the previous kalpa when Lord Brahma awakened from his sleep, he found the whole earth submerged in water. He meditated on Lord Vishnu, who took the incarnation of Varaha and retrieved the earth and established it in its original position. Lord Brahma then created all the four worlds—Bhurloka, Bhuvarloka, Swargloka and Maharloka and divided the earth into seven islands.

First of all, Lord Brahma created the 'Mahattatva'. After that he created the 'Tanmatras', Indriyas (sense-organs), the immovable things like mountains, rivers, animals, deities, demons, human beings etc.

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THE FOUR PROMINENT CASTES

On being asked by Bhishma about the origin of the four prominent castes, Sage Pulastya said— Lord Brahma created the Brahmins and the

Kshatriyas from his mouth and chest respectively. Similarly, Vaishyas and Shudras manifested from Lord Brahma's thigh and feet respectively.Lord Brahma had created his 'manasputras' with the objective of increasing the population and their names were Bhrigu, Pulah, Kratu, Angira, Marichi, Daksha, Atri and Vashishtha. But all of them were free from worldly desires and extremely virtuous. Seeing his effort go in vain, Lord Brahma became furious, as a result of which Rudra manifested from his forehead. Half of Rudra's body resembled like a male while the remaining half appeared like a female. Lord Brahma instructed Rudra to detach the female form from his body and commence copulative creation. Following his advice, Rudra detached the female part of his body and created eleven male entities. Similarly he created various female entities from the female part of his body.

This way, the first human pair- Manu and Shatarupa came into existence. In course of time four children were bom to them—Priyavrata, Uttanpad, Prasuti and Akuti. Prasuti was married to Daksha Prajpati, while Akuti became the wife of Ruchi Prajapati. Prasuti gave birth to 24 daughters—Shradha, Lakshmi, Dhriti, Pushti, Tushti, Medha, Kriya, Buddhi, Lajja, Vapu, Shanti, Keerti, Khyati, Sati, Sambhuti, Smriti, Preeti, Kshama, Santati, Ansuya, Urja, Swaha and Swadha. Out of them, the former thirteen were the wives of Dharma and the rest were married to various sages like Bhrigu, Shiva, Marichi, Angira, myself (Pulastya), Pulaha, Kratu, Atri, Vashishtha, Agni, etc. Shradha gave birth to 'Kam', Lakshmi to 'Darpa, Dhriti to Niyam, Tushti to Santosh, Pushti to Lobha, Medha to Shrut, Kriya to Dand, Nay and Vinay, Buddhi to Bodh, Lajja to Vinay, Vapu to Vyavasay, Shanti to Kshama, Siddhi to Sukh and Keerti gave birth to Yash. All of them were the sons of Dharma.

Kam had a son named Harsh from his wife Nandi, Bhrigu's wife Khyati gave birth to a daughter named Lakshmi—the consort of Lord Vishnu. Lord Rudra accepted Sati—the daughter of Daksha Prajapati as his wife. Hinsa was the wife of Adharm and gave birth to Anrit and Nikriti. Anrit had two sons—Maya and Narak, while Ni kr iti had two daughters—Maya and Vedana. Maya married Maya while Vedana became the wife of Narak. Maya had a son named Mrityu—the lord of death and Vedana gave birth to Dukh. Five children were born to Mrityu—Vyadhi, Jara, Shok, Trishna and Krodha. All of them were celibates and had no progeny.

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THE MANIFESTATION OF GODDESS LAKSHMI

Bhisma expressed his desire to know about the manifestation of goddess Lakshmi.

Pulastya replied— Once, after being defeated by the demons, the deities went to Lord Vishnu and sought his help. Lord Vishnu instructed them to collect all the medicinal herbs, and put them in the Ksheersagar, so that after the churning of the ocean ambrosia could be retrieved.Lord Vishnu also advised them to use the Mandar mountain as a Churner and the serpent—Sheshnag as a rope for churning the ocean.The deities then reached an agreement with the demons according to which both the groups were supposed to unitedly churn the ocean. The great Mandar mountain was uprooted and placed on the back of the tortoise—the embodiment of Lord Vishnu. Sheshnag coiled around that mountain and both the ends were held by the demons and the deities respectively. The deities intelligently chose the tail-end, while the demons in their foolishness chose the mouth-end. The venom spilled by Sheshnag destroyed the power and strength off the demons. When the process of Churning began, the first thing to emerge from the sea-bed was Kamdhenu—the holy cow. The deities claimed the ownership of this divine cow. Subsequently, Varuni (intoxicating drink) emerged from the sea-bed, which was claimed by the ignorant demons. During the process of ocean-churning, various kinds of things emerged out from the ocean—Parijat, sixty crore apsaras, the moon and Kalkut (poison), which were distributed among the demons and the deities. Lord Mahadeva drank the Kalkut when he saw that there was no taker for it.

The churning of ocean also resulted into the manifestation of ambrosia-pot, Uchchaishrava (horse) and Airavat (elephant). Ultimately, goddess Lakshmi manifested herself, seated on a lotus. The deities eulogised her by chanting the mantras of Sri Sukta. The deities were desirous of having goddess Lakshmi on their side, so were the demons, but Lord Brahma instructed Vishnu to accept her as his consort. The demons became furious and snatched the ambrosia-pot from the hands of Sage Dhanvantari. Lord Vishnu then disguised himself as the most enchanting woman and fooled the demons into giving back the ambrosia-pot. Lord Vishnu gave the pot to the deities who became immortal after drinking ambrosia. A tremendous battle was fought between the demons and the deities. But, the demons were defeated in this battle and fled to the netherworld to protect their lives. The deities eulogised Lord Vishnu and returned to heaven.

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SATI GIVES UP HER LIFE

On being enquired by Bhisma about the reason why Sati gave up her life, Sage Pulastya narrated the following tale —

Once, Daksha Prajapati had organised a grand yagya in which he had invited everybody except Lord Shiva. This Yagya was presided over by four prominent sages—Vashishtha, Angika, Brihaspati and Narada. Sati went to attend the yagya despite Lord Shiva's reluctance to send her. After reaching there she asked Daksha about the reason why he had not invited Lord Shiva.

Daksha said—"Your husband is unworthy of being in the company of other deities, because of his abhorrent appearance. He smears ashes on his body and wanders through the cremation grounds. In the name of clothes, your husband puts on tiger's skin. A garland of skulls keep on hanging down his neck. All species of serpents coil around his body. Do you think he is eligible to sit in the company of the deities? Your husband had brought great shame on me and this is the reason why I did not invite him."

Sati could no more listen to her husband's criticism and gave up her life by jumping into the oblation-fire.When the news of Sati's death reached Lord Shiva, he became extremely furious and sent his ganas to avenge her death. The Ganas went and created havoc at the oblation-site.After the death of Sati, Lord Shiva became a recluse and lost all interest in his life. His mind was preoccupied by nothing else but the thoughts of her beloved.One day, Sage Narada informed Lord Shiva about Sati's rebirth as the daughter of Himvan and Mena. Lord Shiva became extremely pleased by this good news. Eventually, he reunited with her eternal consort Parvati.

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THE ORIGIN OF DEITIES, DEMONS and SERPENTS

Bhisma requested Sage Pulastya to explain how different entities like the deities, demons and serpents came into being.

Pulastya replied—Having failed in his repeated attempts of increasing population by the means of 'sankalpa' Daksha Prajapati was left with no option but to take the help of copulative creation. He begot sixty daughters from his wife named Virini. In course of time ten of them were married to Dharma whose names were—Arundhati, Vasu, Jami, Lamba, Bhanu, Marutvati, Sankalpa, Muhurta, Sadhya and Vishwa.Vishwa gave birth to Vishwadeva, while Sadhya was the mother of Sadhya. Marutvati gave birth to Marutvan. Vasu had eight sons who became famous as the Vasus—yourself (Bhisma), Dhruva, Soma, Dhar, Anil, Anal, Pratyush and Prabhas. Bhanu had a son by the same name i.e. Bhanu. Mahurta begot deities, who were the lords of auspicious moments. Lamba gave birth to Ghosh while Jami had a daughter named Nagvithi. Arundhati became the mother of all the creatures of this world. As far as the offspring of eight Vasus are concerned, 'you' (Bhisma) have four sons—Shant, Vaitand, Samb and Munibabhru. Dhruva had a son named Kal. While Soma was the father of Varcha. Dhar had two sons—Dravin and Havyavah. Anil had three sons— Pran, Raman and Shishir. Anal also had three sons—Shakh, Upshakh and Naigameya. Pratyush had a son named Deval, who later on became a famous sage. Prabhas was the father of Prajapati Vishwakarma —the architect of the deities.

The names of the eleven Rudras are—Ajaikpad, Ahirbudhnya, Virupaksh, Raivat, Har, Bahuroop, Trayambak, Savitra, Jayant, Pinaki and Aparajit. All of them are said to be the lords of the Ganas and have all together 84 crore progenies known as the Rudraganas.

Sage Kashyapa had thirteen wives—Aditi, Diti, Danu, Arishta, Sursa, Surabhi, Vinta, Tamra, Krodhvasha, Ira, Kadru, Khasa and Muni. Kashyapa had two sons from Diti—Hiranyakashipu and Hiranyaksha. Hiranyakashipu had four sons—Prahlada, Anuhlad, Sanhlad and Hlad. Prahlada also had four sons—One of them was Virochan. Virochan was the father of Bali. Banasur, who had one thousand arms, was the eldest son of Bali.Hiranyaksha had four sons, who themselves had 27 crore sons and grandsons in all. Kashyapa had begotten one hundred sons from Danu, among whom Viprachitti was the most powerful.Viprachitti had fourteen sons from Sinhika—Sainhikeya (Rahu), Kansa, Shankh, Nala, Vatapi, Ilwal, Namuchi, Khasrima, Anjan, Narak, Kalnabh, Parmanu, Kalpavirya and Dhanuvanshavivardhan.

Kashyapa also had six daughters from Tamra-Shuki, Shyeni, Bhasi, Gridhi, Sugridhi and Shuchi. All six of them gave birth to various species of birds. Shuki was the mother of Parrots and Owls. Shyeni gave birth to hawks while Bhasi was the mother of ospreys (a large fish eating birds.) Gridhi gave birth to Vultures and Sugridhi was the mother of pigeons. Shuchi was the mother of cranes, Swans and other similar aquatic birds. Vinita was the mother of Garuda and Arun—Supreme among birds. Arun was the father of Sampati and Jatayu. Sursa was the mother of the serpents and had given birth to one thousand snakes. Similarly, Kadru gave birth to one thousand cobras.Surabhi, one of the thirteen wives of Kashyapa had given birth to cows, buffaloes as well as beautiful women. Muni was the mother of the celestial damsels —apsaras. Arishta gave birth to Kinnars and Gandharvas. Ira was the mother of various vegetation like grass, trees, creepers and bushes. Khasa gave birth to crore of Rakshashas (monsters) and Yakshas.Kashyapa had also begotten forty-nine Marudganas from Diti.

THE ORIGIN OF DEITIES, DEMONS and SERPENTS

Bhisma requested Sage Pulastya to explain how different entities like the deities, demons and serpents came into being.

Pulastya replied---Having failed in his repeated attempts of increasing population by the means of 'sankalpa' Daksha Prajapati was left with no option but to take the help of copulative creation. He begot sixty daughters from his wife named Virini. In course of time ten of them were married to Dharma whose names were---Arundhati, Vasu, Jami, Lamba, Bhanu, Marutvati, Sankalpa, Muhurta, Sadhya and Vishwa.Vishwa gave birth to Vishwadeva, while Sadhya was the mother of Sadhya. Marutvati gave birth to Marutvan. Vasu had eight sons who became famous as the Vasus---yourself (Bhisma), Dhruva, Soma, Dhar, Anil, Anal, Pratyush and Prabhas. Bhanu had a son by the same name i.e. Bhanu. Mahurta begot deities, who were the lords of auspicious moments. Lamba gave birth to Ghosh while Jami had a daughter named Nagvithi. Arundhati became the mother of all the creatures of this world. As far as the offspring of eight Vasus are concerned, 'you' (Bhisma) have four sons--Shant, Vaitand, Samb and Munibabhru. Dhruva had a son named Kal. While Soma was the father of Varcha. Dhar had two sons--Dravin and Havyavah. Anil had three sons--- Pran, Raman and Shishir. Anal also had three sons---Shakh, Upshakh and Naigameya. Pratyush had a son named Deval, who later on became a famous sage. Prabhas was the father of Prajapati Vishwakarma--the architect of the deities.

The names of the eleven Rudras are---Ajaikpad, Ahirbudhnya, Virupaksh, Raivat, Har, Bahuroop, Trayambak, Savitra, Jayant, Pinaki and Aparajit. All of them are said to be the lords of the Ganas and have all together 84 crore progenies known as the Rudraganas.

Sage Kashyapa had thirteen wives---Aditi, Diti, Danu, Arishta, Sursa, Surabhi, Vinta, Tamra, Krodhvasha, Ira, Kadru, Khasa and Muni. Kashyapa had two sons from Diti---Hiranyakashipu and Hiranyaksha. Hiranyakashipu had four sons---Prahlada, Anuhlad, Sanhlad and Hlad. Prahlada also had four sons---One of them was Virochan. Virochan was the father of Bali. Banasur, who had one thousand arms, was the eldest son of Bali.Hiranyaksha had four sons, who themselves had 27 crore sons and grandsons in all. Kashyapa had begotten one hundred sons from Danu, among whom Viprachitti was the most powerful.Viprachitti had fourteen sons from Sinhika---Sainhikeya (Rahu), Kansa, Shankh, Nala, Vatapi, Ilwal, Namuchi, Khasrima, Anjan, Narak, Kalnabh, Parmanu, Kalpavirya and Dhanuvanshavivardhan.

Kashyapa also had six daughters from Tamra--Shuki, Shyeni, Bhasi, Gridhi, Sugridhi and Shuchi. All six of them gave birth to various species of birds. Shuki was the mother of Parrots and Owls. Shyeni gave birth to hawks while Bhasi was the mother of ospreys (a large fish eating birds.) Gridhi gave birth to Vultures and Sugridhi was the mother of pigeons. Shuchi was the mother of cranes, Swans and other similar aquatic birds. Vinita was the mother of Garuda and Arun---Supreme among birds. Arun was the father of Sampati and Jatayu. Sursa was the mother of the serpents and had given birth to one thousand snakes. Similarly, Kadru gave birth to one thousand cobras.Surabhi, one of the thirteen wives of Kashyapa had given birth to cows, buffaloes as well as beautiful women. Muni was the mother of the celestial damsels --apsaras. Arishta gave birth to Kinnars and Gandharvas. Ira was the mother of various vegetation like grass, trees, creepers and bushes. Khasa gave birth to crore of Rakshashas (monsters) and Yakshas.Kashyapa had also begotten forty-nine Marudganas from Diti.

THE ORIGIN OF MARUDGANAS

Bhisma requested Sage Pulastya to describe how all the Marudganas came into existence.

Pulastya replied— All the sons and grandsons of Diti had perished in the battle fought between the deities and demons. Diti—the mother of daityas (demons) wanted to take revenge, so she started doing a penance at the bank of river Saraswati, which lasted for 100 years.Being pleased by her austere penance Sage Kashyapa arrived and expressed his desire to bless her with a boon. Diti wanted a mighty son who could kill Indra. Sage Kashyapa then implanted his sperms in Diti's womb and instructed her to remain there (where she had been doing penance) for 100 years. He also instructed her on various do's and don'ts which a pregnant woman is expected to observe. Diti agreed to follow his instructions.Mean while, Indra got wind of her pregnancy and became scared. He wanted to destroy the foetus at any cost, so he arrived at the place where Diti was staying. He had disguised himself to avoid being recognized by Diti. He engaged himself in her servitude, waiting for an opportune moment to destroy the foetus.

This way, ninety-nine years had passed and only three days were remaining after which Diti was expected to give birth to a son. As the inevitable day approached nearer, Indra started becoming restless. One day, Diti was very tired and fell down asleep. Her hair was untied and her head had stooped down while she was sleeping, just opposite to the instructions Kashyapa had given to her. Finding the moment opportune, Indra entered into Diti's womb and cut the foetus into seven pieces with his Vajra. The seven fragments of foetus instantaneously got transformed into seven infants and started wailing. Indra became furious and once again he attacked them with his vajra and severed them into seven pieces each. But to Indra's sheer amazement, there were 49 infants, all wailing loudly. He tried to stop them from crying by shouting 'Marud' (don't cry), but to no avail.

Indra realized that the infants had attained immortality on account of the 'Pournamasi Vrata', which Diti had devoutly observed during the course of her penance. Indra named the infants as Marudganas and blessed them. He then begged for Diti's forgiveness and took her along with the Marudganas to heaven. The Marudganas, despite being born in the clans of demons, never associated with them and hence were revered even by the deities.Bhisma expressed his curiosity to know about the detailed description of all the fourteen manvantars. Pulastya said—The first manvantar was called Swayambhuva, named after Swayambhuva- Manu.

Yamya was the prominent deity of this manvantar. Marichi and other six prominent sages were the Saptarishis of this manvantar. Swayambhuva Manu had ten sons—Aghnigha, Agnibahu, Vibhu, Savan, Jyotishman, Dyutiman, Havya, Medha, Medhatithi andVasu.

The second manvantar was named after Swarochish Manu. Swarochish Manu had four sons— Nabh, Nabhasya, Prasriti and Bhavan. Tushit was the prominent deity of this second manvantar. Dattatreya, Atri, Chyavan, Stanba, Pran, Kashyapa and Brihaspati were the saptarishis of this manvantar.

The third manvantar was called Autam and derived its name from Autami Manu, who had ten sons-Isha, Urj, Tanuj, Shuchi, Shukra, Madhu, Madhav, Nabhasya, Nabh and Saha, Bhanusangyak was the prominent deity of this manvantar. Sage Urj and other six sages were the saptarishis then.

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The fourth manvantar was called Tamas—named after Tamas Manu, who also had ten sons like his predecessor. The names of his sons were—Akalmash, Tapodhanva, Tapomool, Tapodhan, Taporashi, Tapasya, Sutapasya, Parantap, Tapobhagi and Tapoyogi. Kavi, Prithu, Agni, Akapi,

Kapi, Janya and Dhama were the Saptarishis of this manvantar, while Sadhyagana was the prominent deity.

The fifth manvantar was called Raivat—named after Raivat Manu, who had ten sons as well— Varuna, Tatvadarshi, chitiman, Havyap, Kavi, Mukt, Nirutsuk, Satva, Vimoh and Prakashak, Bhutraja and Prakriti were the two prominent deities of this manvantar and the names of the saptarishis were—Devabahu, Subahu, Parjanya, Somap, Muni, Hiranyaroma andSaptashva.

Next arrived the sixth manvantar—Chakshush. This Manvantar derived its name from Chakshush Manu, who had ten sons and among whom Ruru was the most prominent one. Lekh, Ribhu, Prithagbhoot, Varimool and Divau were the prominent deities of this manvantar. The names of Saptarishis were—Bhrigu, Sudhama, Viraj, Vishnu, Narada, Vivaswan and Abhimani.

The present manvantar, which is the seventh in order, is called Vaivaswat. The Saptarishis of this manvantar are—Atri, Vashishtha, Kashyapa, Gautam yogi, Bhardwaj, Vishwamitra and Jamdagni.

The eighth manvantar will be called Savarnya and will be named after Savarni Manu, Savarni Manu will have ten sons—Dhriti, Variyan, Yavasu, Suvarna, Dhrishti, Charishnu, Adya, Sumati, Vasu and Shukra. The Saptarishis of this manvantar will be—Ashwatthama, RishyaSringa, Kaushikya, Galav, Shatanand, Kashyap and Parashurama.

The ninth manvantar will be named after Ruchi—Manu and will be called Rauchya manvantar. Ruchi Manu will have a son named Rauchya.

The tenth manvantar will be called Bhautya and will derive its name from Bhautya Manu—son of Bhuti.

The eleventh, twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth manvantars will be named after Merusavami, Ribhu, Veetdhama and Vishkvasen Manus respectively. All these fourteen Manus successively rule this world for the total period of 1000 Chaturyugas. At the end of Kalpa each of them unite with Lord Brahma.

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KING PRITHU AND THE SURYA DYNASTY

Bhisma enquired Sage Pulastya about the mighty King Prithu upon whom the earth was named as Prithvi.

Sage Pulastya replied—Anga-Prajapati was the descendant of Swayambhuva Manu and Sunitha was his wife. In course of time, Sunitha gave birth to a son, who was named Vena. After growing up, Vena turned out to be an extremely irreligious person and used to spend his time committing all sorts of immoral deeds. The sages tried to bring him to the virtuous path but to no avail. They became furious and cursed Vena as the result of which he died. The sages then churned his dead body, which resulted into the manifestation of a mean caste called Mlechchha. They kept on churning his body and in the process, an extremely virtuous entity manifested from the right hand of Vena. He held various weapons like mace, bow and arrows in his hands. He was none other than Prithu, the embodiment of Lord Vishnu.

After being crowned as a king, Prithu was saddened to see the prevalence of immorality throughout the length and breadth of earth. The lack of virtuosity and religiousness among the inhabitants of earth made him extremely furious. He decided to destroy the earth. The earth became scared and fled in the guise of a cow. Prithu chased her wherever she went. At last, the cow halted at a place as she had got tired. To save her life, the cow agreed to fulfill all the desires of Prithu. Prithu then milked the cow, which later on got transformed into cereals. Similarly all the deities, ancestors and other human-beings milked the cow and received numerous invaluable things.

Prithu was a just king. Peace and prosperity prevailed during his reign. People were religious and free from any kind of sorrow. The earth is named after him as Prithvi.Sage Pulastya then went on to give a detailed description of Surya dynasty—Vivaswan (Surya) had three queens—Sangya, Ragyi and Prabha. Ragyi had a son named Raivat while Somgya was the mother of Vaivaswat ~ Manu, Yama and Yamuna. Once, Sangya being unable to bear the extreme radiance of Surya created a superficial entity from her body and instructed her to act as Surya's wife in her absence. The name of this superficial woman was chhaya, who had two sons and two daughters from Surya. The names of her sons were Savama—Manu and Shanaishchar, while the names of her daughters were Tapti and Vishti.

Shanaishchar became immortal as a planet while Yamuna and Tapti became rivers. Vaivaswat Manu had ten sons among whom 'Ila' was the

eldest. After appointing Ila as his successor, Vaivaswat, manu went to do penance.Once, Ila transformed into a woman after tresspassing a forest where Lord Shiva and Parvati were enjoying privacy. It was Lord Shiva's curse that any male who ventured in to that forbidden forest would become a woman. Later on, Buddh became enchanted by Ha's beauty and married her.

Meanwhile, when Ila did not return to his kingdom, his brother Ikshvaku went in search of him. Ikshvaku reached the outskirts of the same forest but did not enter it. He managed to please Shiva by his devotion. When Lord Shiva appeared, Ikshvaku requested him to make Ila a man once again. Shiva told him that it was impossible but assured him by saying "If you perform an Ashwamedha Yagya and donate all the virtue thus acquired to me, then your brother will be able to live as a man for one month. But, after one month he will again become a woman. Thus, his form will keep on changing every alternate months."

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Meanwhile Ila gave birth to four sons among whom Utkal, Gaya and Haritashwa were prominent. This way, Ila became the source from which the lineage of chandra sprouted. Ikshvaku ruled over Madhya-desh. He had one hundred sons, all of whom ruled the territories situated north of

Meru Mountain. Ikshvaku also had one hundred and fourteen more sons, who ruled over the areas situated south of Meru. Kakusttha was Ikshvaku's grand-son. Kakusttha had a son named Suyodhan. Some other prominent kings coming from this lineage were—Prithu, Vrihadashwa, Kuwalashva, Purukutsu, Dharmasetu, Muchukund, Tridhanva, Traidharun, Satyavrat and Satyarath.

The most truthful king Harishchandra was Satyarath's son and Rohit was his son. Famous kings like Raghu, Dilip Aja, Dirghabahu and Prajapati Dasharath were the descendants of Ikshvaku. Dasharath had four sons among whom Sri Rama was the eldest and who had killed the demon king Ravana. Rama had two sons—Lav and Kush.

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BASHKALI--THE DEMON KING

Bhisma requested Sage Pulastya to reveal Why Lord Vishnu had to take incarnation as Vamana. Sage Pulastya replied— Once, during Satya Yuga,

the demons had defeated the deities and driven them out from their abode—heaven. The mighty demon, Bashkali was their leader. He had become immortal an account of a boon received from Lord Brahma. Indra went to Lord Brahma and narrated the aweful tale of the deities. Lord Brahma assured him that Lord Vishnu would certainly help in this matter. Lord Brahma contemplated on Lord Vishnu who appeared in a very short time.

When Lord Vishnu came to know about the deities's pitiable condition, he promised them that very soon Bashkali's wings would be clipped.

Lord Vishnu said—"Very soon, I will take incarnation as Vamana. Indra will have to come along with me and demand a piece of land measured by my three steps. I shall then reveal my giant form and send him to the Patal loka after making him bereft of his kingdom. In course of time Lord Vishnu manifested as Vamana from Aditi's womb. His manifestation was simultaneously marked by various auspicious signs—the air became full of fragrance, the deities started rejoicing, the trees started shedding flowers on their own and all the desires of living beings were fulfilled.

Lord Vamana then went to Bashkali's palace accompanied by Indra. Both of them marvelled at the grandness of Bashkali's city, which was surrounded by a high boundary-wall.Bashkali was a very virtuous and benevolent king. He was truthful and well versed in all the scripture. His subject lived in prosperity and enjoyed a long life. When the demons saw Indra coming with a dwarf they informed Bashkali. Bashkali instructed the demons to bring both the guests with due respect.

Bashkali treated his guests with all honor and asked Indra about the reason for his sudden arrival. Indra praised Bashkali's benevolence and said—"The short brahmin accompanying me is desirous of a piece of land measured by his three steps." Bashkali was amused at this ridiculous demand and requested Vamana to ask for anything he wished. But, Vamana wanted nothing more than a small piece of land measured by his three steps.

Shukracharya (Bashkali's guru) smelled something fishy and warned him, but he was not to listen. Bashkali then requested Vamana to go ahead and measure the land by his three steps.Suddenly, Lord Vamana transformed

his physique into a giant size. His first step reached the Surya-loka and his second step touched the Dhruva-loka. He hit the top of the universe with his third step as a result of which water poured down. The water got collected and came to be known as Vaishnavi river. But, the land had still not been measured and hence Lord Vamana reminded Bashkali of his vow and ultimately the helpless Bashkali surrendered to the will of Lord Vamana and sought his refuge. Lord Vamana blessed him and sent him to Patalloka.

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SRI RAMA KILLS SHAMBUK

After killing the demons king Ravana, Sri Rama returned to Ayodhya. Many sages had arrived there to bless him on the occasion of his

crowning ceremony. Sage Vashishtha was one of them.As Sri Rama was conversing with the sages a brahmin arrived there with the corpse of his son and wailed—"O son! Your death is certainly due to some flaw of Sri Rama. Now, your mother and I have decided to give up our lives as there is no point in living."

Sri Rama's heart was filled with grief and he asked Sage Vashishtha as to how the brahmin could be helped. Sage Vashishtha revealed to Sri Rama that the brahmin's son had died a premature death because of Shambuk. Vashishtha said—"Shambuk is a Shudra by birth, but he is doing an austere penance. Shudras are not entitled to do penance in all the three yugas, except the Kali Yuga. So, only his death can bring back the brahmin's son alive."

Sri Rama instructed both his younger brothers—Lakshman and Bharata, to look after the state's affairs in his absence and went in search of Shambuk boarded on his Pushpak Vimana. Sri Rama saw a man doing penance at the shore of a reservoir. He landed his Pushpak Vimana and went near that man. He introduced himself and enquired about the man's identity. Sri Rama asked— Why are you doing such an austere penance. Who are you?

Without moving the man replied that he was a shudra named Shambuk. He said— I am desirous of attaining to devaloka and hence I am doing this penance. Sri Rama took out his sword and severed Shambuk's head. All the deities hailed Sri Rama and the brahmin's child became alive

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MANIFESTATION OF GANESH AND KARTIKEYA

Once, before taking her bath, goddess Parvati anointed unguent on her body and while removing it created a human form from the accumulated

dross. The head of this human form resembled an elephant. Parvati then playfully immersed the human-form into river Ganga. But, to her sheer amazement the human form became alive and of enormous size. She accepted him as her son and he was none other than elephant-headed deity Ganesh.

Once, Lord Shiva became so deeply fascinated by her consort. Parvati hat he did not come out from his palace for 1000 years. The deities became worried and sent Agni to find out the reason. Agni disguised himself as a parrot and entered the palace where Shiva was enjoying privacy with Parvati.

Meanwhile, Parvati went at the bank of a reservoir to quench her thirst. After reaching there she saw six divine women (matrikas) carrying water in the leaves of lotus flowers. As Parvati was thirsty, she requested them to give some water. The matrikas agreed on the condition that a son bom to her (Parvati) should also have to be accepted as their son. Parvati gave her conscent. The matrikas gave Parvati water to drink.

Hardly had Parvati finished drinking water than a divine child emerged out from her womb. The child possessed various weapons like, trident, shakti and a noose in his hands. He was none other than Kartikeya.The deities appointed Kartikeya as the commander of their army. During that time, a mighty demon named Tarakasur used to torment the deities. Kartikeya killed that demon on the request of deities.

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AN IDEAL BRAHMIN AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF GAYATRI MANTRA

Describing about the qualities of an ideal brahmin. Sage Pulastya said—

Once, Narada had asked Lord Brahma as to who was worthy of receiving Vishnu's blessings. Lord Brahma had told Narada that Lord Vishnu showered his blessings on those who engaged themselves in the service of brahmins. A brahmin should be virtuous and well versed in all the scriptures. A brahmin who does not observe the rituals as mentioned in the Vedas, brings disgrace to his ancestors. An ideal brahmin is respectful towards his parents, teachers and treats his guests with due honor. He never aspires for women other than his wife and chants the sacred Gayatri mantra everyday.

Goddess Gayatri is said to have manifested in the lineage of Sankhyayan. She is of fair complexion and fire is the symbolical expression of her mouth. Lord Brahma dwells on her forehead, Lord Vishnu in her heart and Lord Rudra has his abode in her braided hair. The Gayatri mantra consists of 24 letters and each of them is related with a specific deity. There is a mention of Gayatri mantra, which consists of 18 letters. It begins with the word 'agni' and ends with 'swaha'. The mantra is as follows—

OM AGNERVAKPUNSI YAJURDEDIN JUSHTA SOMAM PIBA SWAHA.

A person, who chants the mantra for 100 times, becomes liberated from gravest of sin. The various deities related with the twenty-four letters of Gayatri Mantra are as follows—

1st letter — Agni 2nd letter — Vayu 3rd letter — Surya 4th letter — Akash

5th letter — Yamraj 6th letter — Varuna 7th letter — Brihaspati 8th letter — Parjanya

9th letter — Indra 10th letter — Gandharva 11th letter — Poosha 12th letter — Mitra

13th letter — Twashta 14th letter — Vasu 15th letter — Marudganas 16th letter — Soma

17th letter —Angira 18th letter —Vishwadeva 19th letter —Ashwins 20th letter—Prajapati

21st letter —All deities 22nd letter — Rudra 23rd letter — Brahma 24th

letter — Vishnu

A devotee should then perform the ritual of 'nyas' by mentally establishing different words of the Gayatri mantra in the various parts of his body as given below —

OM BHUH —in the heart, OM BHUVAH — in the head, OM SWAH —in the top-knot, OM TATSAVITURVARENYAM—in the whole body, OM BHARGODEVASYA DHIMAHI —in both eyes, OM DHIYO YO NAH PRACHODAYAT —in both hands.

Regular chanting of Gayatri mantra bestowes similar virtues attained by the study of all the four vedas. A brahmin who does not know Gayatri mantra is considered to be worse than a shudra. Anybody who chants Gayatri mantra attains salvation.

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BRAHMIN'S LIVELIHOOD

Describing how a brahmin should earn his livelihood, Lord Brahma said to Narada—Alms, which a brahmin gets without making any demand for

it, is called Vritta. 'Unchhavritti' is even better than Vritti and it means collecting foodgrain which are scattered in places like fields, granary, market-place etc. A brahmin should accept the Dakshaina that his host gives him after the completion of yagya ceremony. He should engage himself in educational activities. He can also earn his livelihood by engaging himself in other auspicious activities.

If the circumstances do not permit a brahmin to earn his livelihood by any of the above mentioned means, then he may opt for the occupation of a kshatriya. In such a case, he should endeavor to have mastery both over the vedas as well as different weaponary. Battle should be his last option. When the very existence of religiousness is at stake, he should wage a war against irreligious people and to protect the religion.

In an emergency situation, a brahmin can also choose the occupation of a Vaishya and earn his livelihood by doing business or agriculture. But, while earning his livelihood by doing agriculture, he should in no circumstances abandon his own duties (duties of a brahmin). He should be honest while doing business and never try to exploit the customers.

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NAROTTAM—THE BRAHMIN

Describing about the importance of five virtuous deeds, Pulastya said to Bhisma— "The five supreme virtuous deeds are-obedience to parents,

faithfulness towards husband, equanimity, not having enmity towards friends and devotion towards Lord Vishnu. By pleasing his father, one pleases all the deities. Mother is superior even to all the places of pilgrimage combined together.

Pulastya then narrated the same tale to Bhisma, which lord Brahma had once told some prominent sages —

Once, there lived a famous Brahmin called Narottam. He had acquired divine powers on account of his austere penance but unfortunately he never treated his parents with respect. After taking his daily bath, Narottam hanged his wet clothes in the open sky without any support and they used to dry without falling down on the earth. This special power had made him very arrogant. One day, a crane flying in the sky passed dung on his face, which made him very furious. Narottam cursed the crane as the result of which it was burnt to death. His special power vanished due to the sin acquired by killing an innocent bird. Now, no longer his clothes remained in suspended position in the sky.

Narottam became very sad. Suddenly he heard a heavenly voice instructing him to see a 'chandala' named Mook. "His discourses would be beneficial for you."- Said the heavenly voice. Narottam went in search of Mook—the chandal and found him in the servitude of his parents. Mook was a great devotee of his parents and his total devotion towards his parents had blessed him with an extraordinary power-his house used to hang in the air without any support. Narottam was deeply amazed at this wonderful sight. He wanted to know how Mook had acquired such divine powers. But, Mook requested him to wait, which made Narottam very angry. Mook then told Narottam—"I can talk to you only after attending to my parents. I am not that crane which was charred to death by your curse. If you don't have time then go and meet that 'faithful-wife. She will answer your questions."

Narottam did not know where that faithful wife lived, so he stood there wondering what to do next. Suddenly Lord Vishnu emerged from Mook's house disguised as a brahmin. He took Narottam to the 'faithful-wife's house. All along the way Lord Vishnu preached Narottam on the qualities of a chaste woman. As both of them were about to reach that chaste woman's house, lord Vishnu disappeared, leaving Narottam all alone.

Narottam requested the woman to enlighten him on the finer points of virtuosity. But, the woman was busy attending her husband and requested him to wait. Narottam threatened to curse her, to which the woman replied—I am not that crane whom you had cursed. If you are in a hurry then you can go and meet 'Dharm-Tuladhar'. He is an honest businessman and is capable of answering your queries."

Lord Vishnu once again appeared from that woman's house disguised as a brahmin. Narottam asked him as to how were both Mook and faithful wife aware of the incident in which the crane was charred to death. Lord Vishnu told him that both of them had acquired this special power by the virtue of their respective religiousness.

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Lord Vishnu and Narottam proceeded towards the place where Dharmtuladhar did his business transactions. As they were about to reach the place, Lord Vishnu disappeared once again, leaving Narottam all alone.Narottam saw Dharmtuladhar busy in his dealings with total

honesty. He requested him to reveal as to what made the wet clothes to hang in the air without any support. Dharmtuladhar requested him to wait but Narottam was in a hurry to get answer to his questions. Dharmtuladhar told Narottam—Please wait for sometime, as I am busy doing my business transactions. If you don't have time then you can go and meet Adrohak, who is fully capable of giving answer to your questions. Lord Vishnu once again accompanied him disguised as a brahmin.

When both of them were about to reach the place where Adrohak used to live, lord Vishnu disappeared and Narottam was left all by himself, once again. Narottam requested Adrohak to preach on the essence of religiousness. Adrohak was a man of impeccable conduct and had full control over the sensual urges. He advised Narottam to meet the supreme devotee of Lord Vishnu, who lived nearby. Adrohak said— You would get answers to all your questions. He will reveal to you the reason that made wet clothes to hang in air without any support. Narottam then proceeded towards the place where the supreme devotee of Lord Vishnu lived. Lord Vishnu once again accompanied him in the guise of a brahmin. After reaching there, Narottam expressed his desire of seeing Lord Vishnu. The supreme devotee took him to a temple situated inside the house-premise.

Narottam was amazed to see the same brahmin, who had been accompanying him all along the way, siting on a lotus flower. He realized that the brahmin was lord Vishnu himself. Lord Vishnu blessed him and said—Be respectful towards your parents, if you want to attain to my abode. I dwell in the houses of people who are virtuous, truthful, possessed equanimity and who have full control over their passion. This is why you found me present at the homes of chandal, Tuladhar and Adrohak. Narottam realized his mistake and decided to be in the servitude of his parents for the rest of his life.

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RUDRAKSHA, AMLA AND TULSI

Once, while describing about the importance of Rudraksha to the sages, Vyasa said— One who wears a Rudraksha rosary is supreme among all

human beings. The mere sight of such a holy man absolves people of their sin. A Rudraksha bead bears features of a Linga and yoni on its surface. One should not wear a rudraksha on which above mentioned features are absent. Similarly two joint beads should never be worn. All the mantras become doubly powerful when chanted with the help of rudraksha-rosary.During Satya Yuga, there lived a mighty demon named Tripurasur. He had conquered the deities and was capable of moving in the space. The deities sought help of Lord Shiva, who killed Tripurasur by the sight of his third-eye. In the process, few drops of sweat, emanating from Shiva's body fell down on the earth. These sweat drops got transformed into a large Rudraksha-tree.

Amla is a very nutritious fruit and great religious significance has been attached to it. Amla fruit is very dear to Lord Vishnu and its use on the auspicious day of Ekadashi brings unmatched virtue. A person who regularly eats amla enjoys a long life.The following tale adequately describes the religious importance of amla —

Once upon a time, a chandala went into the forest for hunting. He hunted many deer and birds. Feeling hungry, he saw an amla tree and climbed up the tree. This way he satiated his hunger by eating sweet amla fruits. Unfortumately while he was climbing down the tree, he fell down and died.When the attendants of Yamaraj arrived to take back his soul, they could not do so even after repeated attempts. The attendants of Yamaraj became very surprised and went to the sages for clarification. The sages revealed to the attendants that they could not go near the chandala's dead body, because he had eaten amla just before his death. Such is the glory of amla!

Once Kartikeya asked Lord Shiva about the holiest tree, which was capable of giving salvation. Lord Shiva replied—The Tulsi plant is supreme among all the vegetations. She is very dear to lord Vishnu and fulfills all the desires of a man. Lord Krishna dwells near the place where there is a Tulsi plant. Spirits and ghosts never dare to venture near the Tulsi plant. If a man attaches a Tulsi leaf to his Shikha at the time of his death, he is liberated from all his sins. One who worships Lord Vishnu by offering Tulsi-leaves attains salvation.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF SURYA'S WORSHIP

Once, while describing about the importance of Surya's worship to Vaishampayan, Sage Vyasa narrated the following tale —

There lived a king named Bhadreshwar. He ruled over Madhyadesh. Once his left hand was infected with leprosy. Bhadreshwar, fearing the prospect of dreadful leprosy spreading to his whole body, decided to end his life. He expressed his desire to the head-priest. The head-priest cautioned Bhadreshwar that if he went ahead with his decision, then the whole kingdom would be destroyed. He said — 'You will be cured of leprosy, if you worship LordSurya.'

The head-priest then told the king about the appropriate rituals of Surya-worship. King Bhadreshwar began his austerities and worshipped Lord Surya by chanting mantras and offering articles like Naivedya, fruits, Ardhya, Akshat etc to the deity. King Bhadreshwar was cured of his leprosy within a year by the virtue of his deep devotion towards Lord Surya.

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BHUMI KHAND

DIFFERENT TYPES OF SIN AND VIRTUE

Once, Yayati requested Matali to describe the various sinful and virtuous deeds, which a man normally commits in his life.

Matali replied—'One who criticizes the vedas and follows the religion of other's after abandoning his own or torments virtuous people is a grave sinner. Similarly, not respecting one's parents, not giving 'Dakshaina' to a brahmin after the completion of a shradha ceremony, studying the scriptures in an impure physical state are some other sinful deeds.

'One who obstructs a hungry man from having his food or thirsty person from quenching his thirst commits a sin similar to that of killing a brahmin.

Matali described some other types of sins —

Back biting, seeing faults with others and demeaning their efforts, acquiring other's land by unfair means, killing innocent animals, having illicit relationship with women other than one's wife, telling lies, showing disrespect to the guests etc, are considered to be sinful deeds.

Describing about the various types of virtuous deeds, Matali said —

Non-violence, forgiveness, truthfulness, devotion towards god, benevolence, abstinence, oblation and meditation are some of the virtuous deeds. Donating food-grains, domesticated animals like horse, cow etc., giving water to a thirsty person are some other types of virtuous deeds. A person who donates wooden sandals a needy brahmin attains to the heaven. Worshipping Lord Shiva or Lord Vishnu enables a man to attain to the Shivaloka or Vishnulokarespectively.

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KING Y AY ATI PROPAGATES VAISHNAVA--DHARMA

King Yayati was the son of Nahush and a descendant of Soma-dynasty. He was a great devotee of Lord Vishnu and had contributed a lot in the

propagation of Vaishnava—dharma. Yayati had sent many emissaries in all directions to propagate Vaishnava—dharma. During Yayati's reign his subject were prosperous and were free from any kind of sorrow. Peace prevailed everywhere and people did not experience any natural calamity like draught or famine.

King Yayati enjoyed an unbelievably long life of one lakh years. He was blessed with eternal youth and his appearance was enough to give an inferiority complex to a young man. All this, he had attained by the virtue of his supreme devotion towards Lord Vishnu. Indra was very scared of Yayati's increasing popularity and feared that if his virtuosity remained intact, he would very soon become the ruler of heaven. Indra instructed Kamadeva and Rati to find some means so that king Yayati could be enticed by human weaknesses like lust and infatuation.

Kamadeva, accompanied by other Gandharvas went to Yayati's palace and sought his permission to stage a play. Yayati gave his permission and the play commenced. Rati appeared on the stage as a beautiful woman and was successful in corrupting the thoughts of Yayati. Yayati became so enchanted by Rati's beauty that he lost his senses and fell down unconscious. Finding the time opportune 'Vriddhavastha' (deity of old age) and 'Kamadeva' entered Yayati's body. This way the deities were successful in their designs and now the signs of old-age started to become evident in Yayati.

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Y AY ATI MARRIES ASHRUBINDUMATI

Once, king Yayati went into a forest for hunting. He saw a stag, which had four horns and chased it. The deer led him deep into the forest and then

disappeared. Yayati was tired and thirsty. He saw a lake and decided to quench his thirst. First of all he took his bath and then drank sweet water from the lake. As Yayati was relaxing at the bank of that lake, he heard a sweet voice singing a song. Yayati proceeded towards the direction from which the sound was coming. He saw a beautiful woman singing a song. Her companion accompanied the beautiful woman. Yayati became enchanted by the divine beauty of that woman and wanted to marry her. The beautiful woman's companion told Yayati that her friend could marry him only after he shed the signs of his old age.

The beautiful woman was Ashrubindumati—the daughter of Rati. Vishala-her companion was the daughter of Varuna. Yayati returned to his palace and requested his two sons—Taru and Yadu to exchange their youth in lieu of his old age, but both of them refused to oblige him. Yayati cursed both of them.

Yayati had a son—Puru from his wife named Sharmishtha. When he made the same request to Puru, he agreed without any hesitation. Yayati became pleased with Puru and appointed him as his successor.

Now, Yayati became young once again and went to meet Ashrubindumati. But, Ashrubindumati's friend Vishala was still not convinced and expressed apprehension that her friend would never play second fiddle to his two wives—Sharmishtha and Devayani.King Yayati, being blinded by his lust, assured Vishala that Ashrubindumati would enjoy the supreme authority and she had nothing to fear. He said—"I promise that you will be my only wife and I will have nothing to do with my wives."

This way Yayati married Ashrubindumati and enjoyed a blissful married life for twenty-thousand years. Once, Ashrubindumati expressed her desire of visiting all the divine places—Indraloka, Brahmaloka, Shivaloka and Vishnuloka. Yayati took back his old age from Puru and returned his youth. He appointed Puru as his successor and instructed his subject to live peacefully. But, the people wanted to be with Yayati, so all of them accompanied him to the heaven. Yayati visited all the divine places and ultimately attained to Vishnuloka.

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KUNJAL--THE ENLIGHTENED PARROT

Once, while describing about the importance of a teacher, Lord Vishnu had narrated the following tale to king Vena— Sage Chyavan came from

the lineage of Bhargav. Once, he arrived at Omkareshwar with the objective of acquiring knowledge. Since he was tired, he decided to take rest under the shade of a Banyan tree. A parrot named Kunjal lived on that tree. The parrot had four young ones-Ujjawal, Samujjwal, Vijjwal and Kapinjal. Kunjal was a very learned parrot and had mastery over all the scriptures. Once, Ujjawal requested Kunjal to give discourse on various aspects of religiousness. Kunjal said—The whole world is full of sorrow. A man can be liberated from his sorrow by the means of salvation because salvation is free from sorrow. Salvation can be attained with the help of abstinence, self-control and having deep devotion in lord Vishnu. The soul being enlightened is also called 'Paramatma'. But, covered by the darkness of ignorance it becomes difficult for the soul to attain salvation. A devotee can meditate on both the forms of Lord Vishnu—Sakar (with form) and Nirakar (formless). But, meditating on the Sakar form is easy for anybody. On the other hand only an enlightened soul can meditate on the 'nirakar' form of Lord Vishnu. There are various austerities related with Lord Vishnu and which if observed by a devotee, pleases him—Jaya, Vijaya, Jayanti, Vanjuli, Tilgandha, Trihsprisha, Akshanda and Manoraksha. All these austerities are similar to different types of Ekadashi or Dwadashi Vrata. Similarly, two other austerities namely Ashunyashayan and Janmashtami are capable of freeing a man from all his sin. A devotee who chants Shatnam stotra attains salvation.

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KUNJAL PREACHES VIJJWAL

Describing the virtue of benevolence to Vijjwal. Kunjal—the learned parrot narrated the following tale —

Once, there lived a king named Subahu who ruled over chola desha. A learned brahmin named Jaimini used to counsel him on religious and spiritual matters. One day, while Jaimini was giving a discourse on the virtue of benevolence, Subahu requested him to describe about those deeds that enables a man either to attain to the heaven or to hell.

Jaimini replied— One who earns his livelihood by improper means definitely goes to hell. Similarly, atheists, licentious people, proudy, backbiters and ungrateful people go to hell too. One who gobbles up other's wealth by illegal means or shows disrespect to his guest goes to hell. One who is a habitual liar or one who kills innocent animals or one who has abandoned the religious path is certain to go to hell.One who is truthful and engages himself in various virtuous deeds like penance, meditation, study of the scriptures, goes to the heaven. One who is respectful towards his elders and leads a virtuous life goes to the heaven. In the same manner, he who is benevolent and free from vices like jealousy hatred etc. goes to the heaven. Similarly, one who leads his life as per the instructions given in the scriptures or has full control over his sensual desires goes to the heaven.

King Subahu was so impressed by Jaimini's preaching that he decided to spend rest of his life in the service of lord Madhusudan. He performed countless oblations as long as he was alive and attained to Vishnuloka after his death.

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KUNJAL NARRATES ABOUT HIS PREVIOUS BIRTH

Sage Chyavan, who had been listening to the narration of Kunjal, was amazed by his profound knowledge. He asked Kunjal—O great soul! Who

are you? From where did you acquire such divine knowledge.'

Kunjal, who remembered everything about his previous birth said—

In my previous birth, I was the youngest son of a brahmin named Vidyadhar. My name was Dharma Sharma. Seeing my dislike for study, my father became worried about my future. I used to waste my time loitering here and there. People used to make fun of my stupidity, which made me extremely sad. I decided to acquire knowledge but did not find anybody willing to teach me.

In due course of time I became old but was still an idiot. One day, I was sitting in a temple cursing my fate. Suddenly, a sage arrived there and asked me as to what made me so sad. I narrated my woeful tale. The sage felt pity on my condition and blessed me with divine knowledge that made me capable of having advance knowledge of all the future incidents of the world. Sage Chyavan was curious to know about the reason that made Dharma Sharma to be bom as a parrot.

Kunjal replied— O Brahmin! A man is influenced by the company he keeps. The reason why I took birth as a parrot is related with an incident, which occurred in my previous birth. Once, a wicked fowler sold a parrot to a brahmin who in turn presented it to me. With the passage of time I became very attached with the parrot and gradually deviated from my virtuous path. As a result all my divine knowledge vanished and I became an idiot once again.

One day, a cat arrived and killed that parrot in my absence. I became very sad and used to spend my time crying over the dead parrot. Ultimately I died but even at the time of death, my mind was preoccupied with the thoughts of my beloved parrot. As a result, I was born as a parrot but fortunately I remembered my previous birth even while I was still in my mother's womb. I was full of remorse and used to curse myself for having wasted my life. Sage Chyavan was amazed by the narration of Kunjal—the learned parrot.

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SWARGA--KHANDA

SOME PROMINENT HOLY PLACES OF BHARATAYARSHA

Once, sages requested Suta to describe about the most prominent places of pilgrimage situated in Bharatavarsha. Suta commenced his narration by describing the origin of creation and then switched over to the geographical characteristics of Bharatavarsha. Suta said—'There are seven prominent mountain ranges in Bharatavarsha-Mahendra, Malay, Sahya, Shaktiman, Rikshavan, Vindhya and Pariyatra. Some prominent rivers supplying potable water to the inhabitants of Bharatavarsha are—Ganga, Sindhu, Saraswati, Godwari, Narmada, Shatadru, Yamuna, Vipasha, Mahanadi, Vidisham, Varunaetc. The names of the main Janapadas situated in the northern part of Bharatavarsha are Kuru, Panchal, Shalva,

Matreya, Jangal, Shoorsen, Pulind, Baudh, Chedi, Matsya, Bhoj, Sindhu, Utkal, Koshal, Madra, Kalinga, Kashi, Malav, Magadh, Videh, Anga, Banga, Surashtra, Kekay, Kashmir and Gandhar. Similarly,

Janpadas like Dravid, Keral. Prachya, Karnatak, Kuntal, Choi, Sauhrid, Kona, Korak, Kalad, Mushal and Sutap are situated in the southern part of Bharatavarsha.

Suta then described about the greatness of Pushkar tirth by recounting an incident related with the Pandavas—

"One day, Sage Narada visited the Pandavas who were living in exile. The Pandavas had visited many places during the course of their exile period and wanted to know about the fruits they had acquired due to their pilgrimage.

"Sage Narada then recounted an incident when king Dilip had once posed the same question to Sage Vashishtha. Sage Vashishtha while describing about the greatness of Pushkar said— Pushkar tirth is the holiest place where lord Brahma has his abode. Deities consider themselves fortunate to be at Pushkar. A person who takes a holy dip at Pushkar and worships lord Brahma acquires virtues equivalent to the accomplishment of the Ashwamedha Yagya."

Sage Vashishtha continued with the description of some other prominent places of pilgrimage like Jambumarg, Narmada Amarkantaketc.

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JAMBUMARG, RIVER NARMADA AMARKANTAK

Continuing with his narration, Sage Vashishtha said— A man desirous of going on a pilgrimage should first of all visit Jambumarg, because it is

revered even by the deities and the sages. By visiting this holy place a man acquires virtue equivalent to the accomplishment of an Ashwamedha Yagya and attains to Vishnuloka. A man should then visit Tundulik Ashrama, Agastya Ashrama and Kanya Ashrama, which are situated near Jambumarg. Taking a dip in the holy water of Kotitirth, situated near Mahakal temple is believed to bestow undiminished virtue. Bhadravat is a famous place of pilgrimage related with Lord Shiva and paying a visit here gives virtue equivalent to donation of 1000 cows.

A man who takes holy dip in river Narmada and performs 'tarpan' in the name of manes acquires fruits similar to the accomplishment of Agnishtom yagya. Narmada is the holiest of all the rivers. A man becomes liberated from his sins by taking bath for three weeks in river Saraswati. Similarly it takes one week of regular bath in river yamuna for a man to become absolved of all his sins. The mere touch of Ganga water liberates a man from all his sins, but mere sight of river Narmada is enough to liberate a man from all his sins.

Kotirudras are believed to dwell in the vicinity of Amarkantak mountain. All together sixty crores and sixty thousand places of pilgrimage are situated all around this holy mountain. Anybody present in the vicinity of this mountain must refrain from any kind of sinful deeds. Visiting Amarkantak mountain during solar and lunar eclipses is considered to be extremely auspicious. Similarly the confluence site of Narmada and Kaveri is considered to be sacrosanct. Anybody who takes a holy dip in the confluence of Narmada and Kaveri becomes liberated from his sins.

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'DHARMA TIRTH' AND YAMUNA-SNAN

Sage Narada continued with the description of various holy places and said— "A pilgrim must visit Dharma Tirth, which is named after the lord

of death—Dharma. Once upon a time Dharmaraj had performed an austere penance at that place this is the reason why it became famous as Dharma Tirth. By visiting Dharma Tirth, a man liberated all his ancestors up to seventh generation. After that a pilgrim should go to Kalap-forest, Saugandhik-forest, Suvarna-Dhumavanti respectively. All the above mentioned holy places are capable of giving salvation."

Describing about the virtues of taking a holy dip in river Kalini (Yamuna) sage Narada said —

A person who takes a holy dip in Yamuna becomes liberated from all his sorrows. The virtue acquired by taking a bath in Yamuna is greater than paying visits to various holy places like Pushkar, Kurukshetra, Brahmavarta and Kashi.Taking a dip in Yamuna also helps in the fulfillment of all the desires of a man. Although, different rituals have been attributed to various yugas like Satya Yuga-penance, Treta Yuga-knowledge, Dwapar Yuga—yagya and Kali Yuga— donation, yet virtue of taking a holy dip in Yamuna transcends even time."

"Although the whole stretch of river Yamuna is believed to be holy, yet Yamuna flowing near Mathura holds special importance because of her deep association with lord Krishna. "Narada narrated a tale to prove the significance of taking a bath in Yamuna.

"During Satya Yuga there lived a Vaishya named Hemakundal. He had earned lot of wealth by dint of hard work. Although he was very rich yet happiness deluded him, as he had no progeny. He was worried as to who would inherit his property after his death.

"In course of time, Hemakundal attained old age and after realizing about the impermanence of the world indulged himself in virtuous deeds. He was blessed with two sons—Srikundal and Vikundal. When both his sons grew up, Hemakundal went into the forest to do penance."

"Sri Kundal and Hemakundal squandered the whole wealth which their father had earned so painstakingly. Both of them were of loose moral character and had illicit relationship with many prostitutes. In a very short time they became poor and both of them starved to death. When the yamdoots reached yamloka after taking their souls, Yamraj ordered

—'Put Sri Kundal in Raurav hell but send Vikundal to the heaven.' While Vikundal was being taken to the heaven he asked one of the yamdoots —'The sins committed by my brother and me were almost identitical then why is my brother being sent to hell while I am being sent to heaven.'

The yamdoot replied-You are being metted out this special treatment on account of your virtues acquired by bathing twice in river Yamuna.There was a brahmin friend of your's named Swamitra.You had accompanied him to Mathura and twice taken bath in the holy Yamuna. By the virtue of the first bath you became liberated from all your sins, while the second bath helped you in attaining to the heaven. Vikundal requested the yamdoot to allow his brother to accompany him to heaven. Yamdoot replied that his brother could accompany him to the heaven provided he donated all his virtues to him.

Vikundal agreed to donate his virtues to his elder brother for the sake of his liberation. This way, both Srikundal and Vikundal attained to the heaven.

'DHARMA TIRTH' AND YAMUNA-SNAN

Sage Narada continued with the description of various holy places and said--- "A pilgrim must visit Dharma Tirth, which is named after the lord of death--Dharma. Once upon a time Dharmaraj had performed an austere penance at that place this is the reason why it became famous as Dharma Tirth. By visiting Dharma Tirth, a man liberated all his ancestors up to seventh generation. After that a pilgrim should go to Kalap-forest, Saugandhik-forest, Suvarna-Dhumavanti respectively. All the above mentioned holy places are capable of giving salvation."

Describing about the virtues of taking a holy dip in river Kalini (Yamuna) sage Narada said--

A person who takes a holy dip in Yamuna becomes liberated from all his sorrows. The virtue acquired by taking a bath in Yamuna is greater than paying visits to various holy places like Pushkar, Kurukshetra, Brahmavarta and Kashi.Taking a dip in Yamuna also helps in the fulfillment of all the desires of a man. Although, different rituals have been attributed to various yugas like Satya Yuga--penance, Treta Yuga--knowledge, Dwapar Yuga--yagya and Kali Yuga--donation, yet virtue of taking a holy dip in Yamuna transcends even time."

"Although the whole stretch of river Yamuna is believed to be holy, yet Yamuna flowing near Mathura holds special importance because of her deep association with lord Krishna."Narada narrated a tale to prove the significance of taking a bath in Yamuna.

"During Satya Yuga there lived a Vaishya named Hemakundal. He had earned lot of wealth by dint of hard work. Although he was very rich yet happiness deluded him, as he had no progeny. He was worried as to who would inherit his property after his death.

"In course of time, Hemakundal attained old age and after realizing about the impermanence of the world indulged himself in virtuous deeds. He was blessed with two sons--Srikundal and Vikundal. When both his sons grew up, Hemakundal went into the forest to do penance."

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KASHIPURI, KAPARDISHWAR AND GAYA

On being asked by Yudhisthira about the grandeur of holy places like Kashipuri, Kapardishwar and Gaya. Narada said —

Just as Lord Mahadeva is supreme among all the deities, in the same manner Kashipuri holds a significant status among all the places of pilgrimage. Hence an individual should make it a point to visit Kashi once in his life time. The famous Shivalinga Kopardishwar is installed at Kashi and is said to fulfill all the desires of a man. Performance of various rituals at Kashi liberates a man from all his sins-all his flaws are eliminated automatically just by residing in Kashi.

A devotee who regularly practices meditation in the temple of Lord Kapordishwar attains Yogasiddhi within six months. Worshipping Lord Kapardishwar after taking a holy dip in Pishach-mochan kunda liberates a man from gravest of sin like Brahmahatya, etc. Gaya is considered to be a sacrosanct place of pilgrimage and various rituals for the pacification of the souls of dead ancestors are performed here. Anybody who offers Pindadan and tarpan at Gaya not only liberates his ancestors but also himself. There is a very famous Banyan tree named Akshayvat at Gaya. Gaya is situated at the bank of river Falgu.

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PURANAS-THE EMBODIMENT OF SRI HARI

According to Suta, all the Puranas are nothing but the mediums through which Sri Hari manifests himself—Brahma Purana is said to be the

forhead of Sri Hari, Padma Purana is said to be the 'heart' of Sri Hari, Vishnu Purana is said to be the 'right arm' of Sri Hari. Shiva Purana is said to be the 'left arm' of Sri Hari. Srimad Bhagawat is said to be his 'thigh', Narada Purana is said to be his 'navel', Markendeya Purana is said to be his 'right-foot'. Agni Purana is said to be his 'left foot', Bhavish Purana is said to be his 'right-knee', Brahma Vaivrata Purana is said to be his 'left-knee'. Linga Purana is said to be his 'right ankle', Varaha Purana is said to be his 'left ankle', Skanda Purana is said to be the hair on the body of 'Sri Hari. Vamana Purana is said to be his skin. Kurma Purana is said to be his back. Matsya Purana is said to be his stomach. Garuda Purana is said to be his bone-marrow. Brahmanda Purana is said to be his bone.

So, all the Puranas being manifestation of different parts of Sri Hari's body are very sacred and capable of bestowing salvation.

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PATAL -KHAND

SHESHNAG NARRATES TALES OF SRI RAMA'S RETURN FROM LANKA

Once, Sages requested Suta to describe about Sri Rama's return from Lanka. Suta narrated the same tale, which Sheshnag had once told Vatsyayan. Sheshnag said—After the killing of demon king Ravana, Sri Rama appointed Vibhishan as the king of Lanka. He then decided to return to Ayodhya on Pushpak-Vimana, which Vibhishan had presented to him. He along with Sita, Lakshman, Sugreev and Hanuman boarded the aircraft and flew towards Ayodhya.The earth looked beautiful from such a high altitude and Sri Rama was continuously describing about the importance of various places over which the aircraft flew. As the aircraft was about to enter the airspace of Ayodhya, Sri Rama recognized Bharata, who was living at Nandigram at that time. Bharata had vowed not to enter Ayodhya till the return of Sri Rama, hence he stayed at Nandigram situated at the outskirts of Ayodhya awaiting Sri Rama's return. He led an austere life as the result of which he had become weak and feeble.

On seeing Bharata, Sri Rama instructed Hanuman to inform him about his (Rama's) arrival. Hanuman went to the hermitage of Bharata and informed him about Sri Rama's arrival. Bharata's joy knew no bound and he expressed his desire to reward Hanuman for bringing such auspicious news. Bharata then accompanied Hanuman and went to meet Sri Rama. Sri Rama's heart was filled with grief when he saw Bharata, who looked like a hermit in his 'Valkal' and 'Kaupin'. On the other hand Bharata cursed himself for being the cause of Sri Rama's miseries. Bharata asked for Sri Rama's forgiveness and said—'O Lord! You had to go into exile only because of me. lean never be absolved of my sin.'

Sri Rama consoled him and after taking Bharata into his embrace enquired about his welfare. He told Bharata that he had to undergo the sufferings of exile because of his own destiny. 'You are not at fault. Don't curse yourself for my misery.' said Sri Rama. At last all of them including Bharata boarded Pushpak Vimana and the aircraft took- off for Ayodhya.Continuing with Sri Rama's tale, Sheshnag said—When Sumanth brought the news of Sri Rama's arrival at Ayodhya, people danced in joy, Preparations started being made for Sri Rama's grand reception. The whole city of Ayodhya was decorated with rows of lighted lamps.

Sri Rama and Sita alighted from the Pushpak Vimana and both of them were carried in a palanquin to the palace. People stood in queues on both

sides of the road with folded hands. Sri Rama blessed them by raising his hand. First of all Rama went to meet Kaikayi who was full of remorse and guilt. Sri Rama consoled her and then went to meet Sumitra to pay his obeisance to her. At last, he went to meet his own mother—Kaushalya, who was dying to see him. Kaushalya blessed Sri Rama, Sita and Lakshman. Bharata then instructed the royal astrologers to decide upon an auspicious moment for Sri Rama's coronation. Thus Sri Rama became the king of Ayodhya. During his reign peace and prosperity prevailed everywhere. People were virtuous and there was no sign of sin.

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RAVANA-- THE MIGHTY DEMON

People of Ayodhya lived peacefully during Sri Rama's reign until one fateful day when they were struck by a bad news—Sri Rama had

abandoned Sita after a Washerman leveled an unfair charge against her character. Such was the greatness of Sri Rama that opinion of each and every individual was given due respect irrespective of his position and status. One day, Sage Agastya arrived in the royal court of Sri Rama. After the formal Salutations were over. Sage Agastya complimented Sri Rama for killing Ravana.

Sri Rama asked Agastya—'Who was Ravana— the tormentor of deities? I am anxious to know about the origin of his whole clan."

Sage Agastya replied-Vishrava was the grandson of Lord Brahma. His father was sage Pulastya. Vishrava had two wives—Mandakini and Kaikasi. Mandakani's son was Kubera while Kaikasi was the mother of Ravana, Kumbhakama and Vibhishan. Kubera ruled over Lanka. One day, Kubera, came to see his parents boarded on his aircraft—Pushpak Vimana. After he returned to Lanka, Ravana, who was very much impressed by Kubera's royal appearances asked Kaikasi— "Who was this fellow? From where did he acquire such an amazing aircraft."

Kaikasi revealed to Ravana that the guest was none other than his step-brother Kubera. She said--"Kubera is the son of your step mother—Mandakini. He has made his mother proud by his conduct but I am ashamed of you, because of your inconsequential existence. You are no better than a worm."

Ravana decided to prove his mother wrong by acquiring insurmountable power and authority. Ravana went to the forest and performed an austere penance for ten thousand years by standing on one foot. He fixed his gaze at the sun and never for a moment did he remove his gaze from it. Kumbhakama and Vibhishan also engaged themselves in austere penance. At last, Lord Brahma became pleased and blessed Ravana with a vast kingdom. Ravana then started tormenting his step-brother Kumbhakama. He snatched Kubera's Pushpak Vimana and drove him out of Lanka. Ravana then turned his attention towards the deities and drove them out of heaven. The deities went to seek the help of Lord Brahma who in turn took them to Lord Shiva. Even Lord Shiva was clueless about the means by which the indomitable Ravana could be subdued. Ultimately all of them including Lord Shiva went to Lord Vishnu and sought his help.

Lord Vishnu assured them by saying —

"I shall take incarnation as Rama at a place called Ayodhya. Presently, Ayodhya is being ruled by Dashrath, who inspite of having three queens, does not have any son. I shall manifest myself as Rama. Don't worry! I shall eliminate the menace called Ravana." Sage Agastya also told Sri Rama that Ravana belonged to the caste called 'Brahmrakshas'. This way, Sage Agastya after having finished his narration looked at Sri Rama anticipating further queries.

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AGASTYA ADVISES SRI RAMA TO PERFORM ASHWAMEDHA YAGYA

Sri Rama requested sage Agastya to tell about the means by which he could become liberated from the sins of killing brahmins. Sage Agastya

advised him to perform Ashwamedha Yagya. He also described the rituals of performing Ashwamedha Yagya— "Get a horse of white colour and after worshipping it on Vaishakh Pumima leave it to wander freely. Tie a piece of paper on its forehead on which your name and other details are mentioned. Soldiers should follow that horse wherever it goes. You should fight a battle against any king who dares to stop the horse. You should lead a celibate life till the horse returns back to the same place from where it had been let loose. It is customary for the performer of Ashwamedha Yagya to indulge himself in benevolent deeds till the completion of Ashwamedha Yagya." Sri Rama agreed to perform Ashwamedha Yagya. He went to the seashore accompanied by numerous sages. He then cultivated a vast expanse of land with the help of a golden plough. A large oblation site was constructed and thus began Ashwamedha Yagya under the supervision of Vashishtha.

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THE HORSE IS LET LOOSE

As per the advice of Sage Vashishtha, Sri Rama instructed his soldiers to bring a white-horse. A white parasol was fixed on its back and the horse

was decorated with colourful clothes. The horse was then let loose and the faithful soldiers of Sri Rama followed it wherever the horse went.A gold-sheet was hanged in the horse's neck and upon which was inscribed —This horse belongs to Sri Rama, the son of Dasharath. Anybody who dares to stop this horse will meet ruthless punishment.

Shatrughan followed the horse as per the instruction of his elder brother, Sri Rama. Bharata and Pushkal also accompanied him. A huge army led by Kalnemi was marching behind the horse.

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LAV FASTENS THE HORSE

Some of the kings tried to stop the horse, but were defeated by Shatrughan. This way the horse continued to move ahead without any

problem till it reached the bank of river Ganga. It was early morning and Lav after noticing the presence of horse become curious. He went near the horse and tried to read the inscription hanging down its neck. He made fun of the might of Sri Rama and fastened the horse. The soldiers tried to release the horse but Lav severed their arms. They returned to Shatrughan and narrated the whole incident to him.

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LAV VANQUISHES THE WHOLE ARMY

Shatrughan became extremely furious after seeing the condition of his injured soldiers. He instructed Kalnemi to teach Lav a lesson. Kalnemi

confronted Lav with a huge army and a ferocious battle took place. Lav managed to kill Kalnemi, which created havoc in the rival's army. The surviving soldiers tried to hold their ground but were forced to flee on account of a fierce assault from Lav.

Shatrughan then ordered Pushkal to fight Lav but he became unconscious after being hit by Lav's arrow. Now, Shatrughan's anger crossed all limits and he ordered Hanuman to kill Lav. Hanuman uprooted a large tree and tried to hit Lav, but Lav cut that tree into hundred pieces with a volley of arrows. Lav then released many arrows in the direction of Hanuman. Hanuman fought valiantly but ultimately he fell down unconscious.

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LAV BECOMES UNCONSCIOUS

When Shatrughan learnt about Hanuman's fate he was infuriated and went to fight Lav. But when he saw a tender looking child in front of him

he was surprised. Shatrughan asked —

'O brave child! Who are you! Who is your father?'

But Lav was not interested in his irrelevant queries and challenged him for a duel. Shatrughan was left with no other option but to fight. A tremendous battle was fought between them. Shatrughan released volleys of arrow towards Lav but all of them were neutralized by him. For a brief time Shatrughan lost his consciousness. After regaining his consciousness, he aimed his most lethal weapon towards Lav. The arrow hit Lav and he fell down unconscious. Lav's companions went and informed Sita about the whole incident. Kush came forward to fight against Sri Rama's army. When he reached the battlefield he saw Lav who was held captive by the enemy's army's. By that time, Lav had regained his consciousness and after seeing Kush he somehow managed to free himself from the clutches of his captors.

Now, both the brothers launched a fierce attack on the enemy. The whole army of Sri Rama started running helter and shelter. It did not take much time for Lav and Kush to vanquish the whole army. All the great warriors like Hanuman, Sugriva, Pushkal, Angad Veermani and even Shatrughan were either held captive or injured in the battle. Both the brothers fastened Hanuman and Sugriva with ropes and took them to Sita. Sita immediately recognized Hanuman and Sugriva. She instructed both her sons to set them free as well as the horse. Lav and Kush followed the instruction of Sita and released everybody from their captivity. Sita then whispered-—'May all the dead soldiers become alive.' Her words came true and all the dead soldiers became alive once again. Shatrughan regained his consciousness too.

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THE ARMY RETURNS TO AYODHYA

Shatrughan decided to return to Ayodhya. He instructed Sumati to make all the necessary arrangements for the safe return of the caravan, which

comprised not only of Sri Rama's army but also of all the defeated kings and their vanquished armies. When Sri Rama came to know about their arrival, he sent Lakshman to receive them. Lakshman received the victorious army with all the honor and the all of them came to the palace. Sri Rama curiously asked Sumati about everything that had happened.

Sumati paraded all the vanquished kings who had made the mistake of stopping the horse— Sumad, Sabahu, Daman, Satyavan, Surath, etc. He then narrated the brave deed of Lav and Kush.He also revealed how mighty warriors like Hanuman, Sugriva, Shatrughan etc. had been defeated by both of them.

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SRI RAMA SENDS LAKSHMAN TO BRING SITA

Sage Valmiki was present in Ayodhya to attend the Ashwamedha Yagya. Sri Rama asked him about the identity of the two children—Lav and

Kush. Valmiki said — Sita was pregnant at the time you had abandoned her. I gave her refuge in my hermitage where she gave birth to twins— Lav and Kush. Both the children were brought up in my hermitage with love and care. I taught them all the sacred texts and scriptures and made them masters of various weaponries. So, Lav and Kush are your sons. You must bring Sita back to Ayodhya with due honor, because she is pure and chaste. Moreover your whole army owe its life to her."

Sri Rama's heart was filled with grief. He instructed Lakshman to bring Sita along with Lav and Kush. Lakshman went to Valmiki's hermitage and requested Sita to return to Ayodhya. Sita refused to return but sent Lav and Kush along with Lakshman. When Sri Rama found that only Lav and Kush had come, he once again sent Lakshman to bring Sita. Lakshman followed his instruction and went to Valmiki's hermitage for the second time. Meanwhile, Valmiki instructed Lav and Kush to sing the praise of Sri Rama in their melodious voice. Everybody was moved by their soulful rendition. Sri Rama took Lav and Kush in his embrace.

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SITA RETURNS TO AYODHYA

Sri Rama eulogised all the revered sages who had arrived to attend the Ashwamedha Yagya. The holy water of Saryu was brought and sprinkled

in the yagya kund where Ashwamedha Yagya was being performed, amidst the chanting of vedic mantras. Hardly had Sri Rama touched the horse with his hands then it transformed into a human being. Everybody was amazed by this incident. Sri Rama asked that man as to how he had attained the form of a horse. The man revealed to the assembled people that he had become a horse due to Durvasa's curse. 'Later on Sage Durvasa had mercy on me and assured that I would regain my human form by the divine touch of Sri Rama.'

Having said this the man attained to the heaven. In course of time Sri Rama organised two more Ashwamedha Yagyas and his glory reverberated through all the three worlds.

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UTTAR - KHAND

BADRIKASHRAMA

Once, on being asked by the sages about the greatness of Badrikasharama, Suta narrated the same tale, which Lord Shiva had once told sage Narada —

Lord Mahadeva had told Narada that altogether there were one lakh and twenty-five thousand mountains and Badrikashrama was supreme among them. Lord Mahadeva said— Badrikasharama is the abode of Lord Nara-Narayan. Narayan—the origin of all creations has four arms and his complexion is dark. Narayan manifests himself in both forms—Sakar as well as Nirakar. He is the eternal Purusha and is worshipped by people during the full period of Uttarayan. Since Badrikashrama is covered with snow during the period of Dakshainayan, Narayan is not worshipper during these six months. All the deities dwell at Badrikasharama. The sages live in their hermitages at Badrikasharama. River Alaknanda flows at Badrikasharama. Anybody taking a dip in the holy water of Alaknanda becomes liberated from his sins.

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THE DESCENT OF RIVER GANGA

Describing about the reason why river Ganga was brought down on the earth, Lord Mahadeva told Narada— King Bhagirath was the architect of

Ganga's arrival on the earth. He wanted to liberate his dead ancestorss from the curse of Sage Kapila. King Sagar came from the lineage of the famous king-Harishchandra. Sagar had two queens. The elder queen had sixty thousand sons while the younger queen had just one—Panchajan. Panchajan's son was Anshuman, who himself was the father of Dilip. Dilip was the father of Bhagirath.

Bhagirath did an austere penance on the Himalayas for ten thousand years. As a result, river Ganga descended on the earth. I (Shiva) held her in the locks of my hair and she remained there for ten thousand more years. Bhagirath requested me to release Ganga so that his ancestors could be liberated. I agreed to release Ganga and Bhagirath took her to the Patalloka where his ancestor's had been charred to death due to Kapila's curse. Bhagirath sprinkled the water of Ganga on the ashes of his ancestors and each of them attained salvation as a result. Eventually, Ganga resurfaced at Haridwar—the most sacred place ofpilgrimage.

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DASHARATH PACIFIES SHANI

Sage Narada curiously asked Lord Mahadeva as to what made Shani such a volatile planet.Lord Mahadeva replied— Shani is extremely violent by

nature and everybody is scarred of this planet. Once, the royal astrologer of Dasharath was petrified at the prospect of Shani entering the constellation of Rohini and warned him of its dire consequences. 'If the Shani is not prevented from entering Rohini, then famine would occur lasting for more than twelve years.' said the royal astrologers.

Dasharath went above the sky to subdue the might of Shani well armed with divine weapons. Shani became terrified on seeing Dasharath in such a menacing mood and expressed his willingness to fulfill his desires.

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QUALITIES OF A VAISHNAV

Giving a detailed description of the qualities of a Vaishnava, Lord Shiva told Narada —

A person who has total devotion in Lord Vishnu is called a Vaishnava. He is truthful, kind and forgiving by nature. He engages himself in austere penance and refrains from any kind of violence. He wears a Tulsi bead in his neck and puts on tilak. He is well versed in sacred text like the Vedas, Puranas etc. The mere sight of a Vaishnava is enough to liberate a sinner from all his sins. Feeding a Vaishnava bestowes virtue equivalent to feeding thousand of ordinary brahmins.

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INDRAPRASTHA

The sages enquired from Suta about the holiest city situated on the banks of river Yamuna.

Suta narrated the tale which Sage Saubhari had once told Yudhisthira—Once, Narada and Parvat were travelling through an aerial route, while they were flying over Khandav forest, they were lured by the beautiful sight of river Yamuna. They decided to take rest for a while. Both of them descended down and entered river Yamuna to take their bath. Meanwhile, King Shibi who ruled over Ushinar saw them. He eagerly waited at the bank of Yamuna. When Narada and Parvat emerged out of the Yamuna, they found king Shibi eagerly waiting for them. Meanwhile king Shibi had noticed the remains of numerous 'havan-kundas' (oblation-altars) spread in a large area.

After the formal exchanges of pleasantaries were over, King Shibi asked Narada about those havan- kundas.

Narada replied—During ancient times Indra had performed numerous Yagyas at this place to express his gratitude to Lord Vishnu, with whose blessings he had regained the heaven from the clutches of Hiranyakashipu. In course of time, this place became famous as Indraprastha. This sacrosanct place is holier than all the holy places combined together. Indraprastha is spread in the area of one yojan from east to west and four yojans from north to south.

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VAIKUNTH-THE ABODE OF LORD VISHNU

Describing about the grandeur of Vaikunth, Lord Shiva told Parvati—A person who has total devotion in Vishnu attains to Vaikunth after his

death. Vaikuntha is the abode of Vishnu and constitutes of numerous Janapadas. The magnificence of Vaikunth is beyond description and it houses many grand palaces fully decorated with jewels and diamonds. The central part of Vaikuntha is called Ayodhya and is well protected by dwarpals named Chanda, Prachanda, Bhadra, Subhadra, Jaya, Vijay, Dhata and Vidhata.Vaikunth is inhabited by countless divine people who live in well illuminated houses.

In the central part of Ayodhya is situated the 'antahpuri' of Lord Vishnu. It is inhabited by celestial beauties—apsaras. There is a divine canopy situated just at the center of antahpuri, where Lord Vishnu has his divine throne. The divine throne is surrounded by deities as well as by the embodiments of all the four Vedas— Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda and Atharvaveda. The deities—Agni, Surya and Chandrama have their dwellings at the center of Vishnu's throne.There is a grand pedestal called yogapeeth established on the throne. A beautiful lotus flower is established on the yogapeeth on which is seated Lord Vishnu along with his consort Lakshmi. Lord Vishnu appears divine in his complexion of a blue lotus, whose radiance is enough to subdue crores of sun. He has radiant ear-rings hangings down his earlobes. His forehead is covered with curly hair. He has the famous 'Kaustubh mani' in his neck. He holds a conch and a chakra in each of his two hands and the remaining two hands are in the posture of giving blessings.

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THE INCARNATIONS OF MATSYA AND KURMA

Once, goddess Parvati expressed her desire to know about all the incarnations of Lord Vishnu. Lord Mahadeva replied— Lord Brahma had

created numerous Prajapatis like Bhrigu, Marichi, Atri, Daksha, Kardam, Pulastya, Pulaha, Angira and Kratu. Marichi was the father of Kashyapa. Sage Kashyapa had four wives—Aditi, Diti, Kadru and Vinta.Aditi was the mother of Deities while Diti gave birth to demons like—Makar, Hayagreeva, Mahabali, Hiranyaksha, Hiranyakashipu Jambha, Maya etc. Makar was a mighty demon, who after deceitfully acquiring the Vedas from Lord Brahma had hidden himself inside an ocean. Lord Brahma requested Vishnu to liberate the sacred Vedas from the possession of Makar.

Lord Vishnu then took the incarnation of Matsya and after killing Makar gave back the vedas to Lord Brahma. Durvasa was the son of Sage Atri. Once, he went to Indraloka to see Indra. At that time, Indra was planning to go out somewhere. Durvasa presented a garland of Parijat flowers to Indra. Indra, after receiving the garland from Durvasa kept it carelessly on the forehead of his elephant-Airavat. This garland was trampled under its feet by the elephant, which infuriated Durvasa. He cursed Indra by saying—Immense prosperity has made you arrogant. But you will become a pauper within a very short time.

Durvasa's words came to be true and Indra found that not only the heaven but all the three worlds had become bereft of goddess Lakshmi. Prosperity vanished and poverty prevailed everywhere. The deities became worried and went to take the help of Brahma. Brahma took the deities to Lord Vishnu. Vishnu became pleased with their eulogy and said —

I will take incarnation as Kurma. If the ocean were churned with the help of Mandarachal mountain and Vasuki, then goddess Lakshmi would manifest herself. I shall hold the Mandarachal mountain on my back. This way the churning of ocean commenced. The Mandarachal mountain was uprooted and placed inside the 'Ksheer-Sagar' and which rested on the back of Lord Kurma. The serpent—Vasuki, was held by deities and demons on both the ends. First of all the most venomous poison—Kalkut emerged from the ocean. Seeing both the deities and demons unwilling to accept it. (Lord Shiva) drank it.

After the emergence of Kalkut, goddess Daridra and Varunai manifested themselves. Similarly, Airavat- elephant, Uchchaishrava-horse,

Dhanvantari, Surabhi—cow and Parijat- tree emerged from the ocean. Ultimately, goddess Lakshmi manifested herself. The deities requested her to dwell in the heart of Lord Vishnu and bless all the three worlds by her presence. Goddess Lakshmi agreed and blessed them.

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NRISIMHA--INCARNATION

Continuing with the various incarnations of Lord Vishnu, Lord Mahadeva told Parvati —

Sage Kashyapa had two mighty sons from Diti—Hiranyakashipu and Hiranyaksha. Hiranyaksha had once carried the earth to Rasatala. The deities requested Lord Vishnu to rescue the earth. Lord Vishnu took the incarnation of a boar and killed Hiranyaksha with his sharp horn. When Hiranyakshipu learnt about his brother's death he went to Merugiri mountain and started doing penance to please me (Lord Shiva). I blessed him with immortality. Later on, Hiranyakashipu married Uttanpad's daughter—Kalyani and had a son named Prahlada from her. In spite of being bom in the clan of a demon, Prahlada proved to be an extremely religious child and was a supreme devotee of Lord Vishnu.

When Hiranyakshipu came to know about Prahlada's religious tendency, he tried his best to stop him from worshipping Vishnu. But, all his efforts went in vain and Prahlada continued to worship Lord Vishnu.Hiranyakashipu instructed his subordinates to kill Prahlada but each time he came out unharmed. One day, Hiranyakashipu pulled out his sword and said—'You say that Vishnu is omnipresent. Is he present in this pillar?' Having said like this he assaulted the pillar with his sword. Suddenly to his sheer amazement, Lord Vishnu manifested himself from that pillar in the form of Nrisimha.

Hiranyakashipu had been blessed by Lord Shiva that he could be killed neither by a man nor a beast. No weapon could harm him. He could be killed neither during the day nor during the night. Hiranyakashiu had taken into consideration all the possible threat perceptions to his life and tried to become immortal. But, Lord Vishnu takes incarnation to protect the humanity whenever religiousness is under threat. This time, Lord Vishnu took incarnation as Nrisimha (partly lion and partly human) and tore apart his belly with his sharp nails. After the death of Hiranyakashipu, Prahlada was coronated as his successor. Prahlada ruled justly and his subject were happy and satisfied.

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VAMANA--INCARNATION

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Prahlada had a son named Virochan.The most benevolent king —'Mahabahu-Bali' was Virochan's son. Bali had defeated the deities and ruled over all the three worlds. Sage Kashyapa commenced the most austere penance—Payovrata to help the deities regain their lost kingdom (heaven) once again. He was accompanied by his wife—Aditi in his penance which lasted for one thousand years. At last, Lord Vishnu became pleased by their penance and appeared before them. Sage Kashyapa narrated the woeful tales of the deities and requested him to make Indra the Lord of all the three worlds. Lord Vishnu promised that he would take incarnation as Vamana. In course of time, Aditi became pregnant and ultimately gave birth to Lord Vamana. Lord Vamana appeared in the form of a 'Brahmchari'. He wore a deer—Skin and carried a stick and a 'mekhala' in both his hands. Lord Vishnu enquired the deities about the future course of action. The deities informed him that Bali was busy performing a yagya and he would not turn down any demand made to him because if he did so there was a fear of loosing all his virtues attained by the performance of the yagya.

Lord Vamana went to the oblation site where Bali was performing a yagya and demanded a small piece of land measured by his three steps. Bali agreed to meet the demand of his guest inspite of Shukracharya's warning. Bali resolved to donate land by holding holy water in his palm. Now, Lord Vamana abandoned his dwarfish form and appeared in a giant form. He measured the whole earth by his first step. Lord Vishnu then measured the whole sky by his second step. The helpless Bali agreed to donate all the three worlds to protect his vow. Ultimately, Lord Vishnu sent Bali to the Rasatala and thus Indra became the ruler of heaven once again.

VAMANA--INCARNATION

Continuing with the various incarnations of Lord Vishnu, Lord Mahadeva told Parvati ---

Prahlada had a son named Virochan.The most benevolent king--'Mahabahu-Bali' was Virochan's son. Bali had defeated the deities and ruled over all the three worlds. Sage Kashyapa commenced the most austere penance--Payovrata to help the deities regain their lost kingdom (heaven) once again. He was accompanied by his wife--Aditi in his penance which lasted for one thousand years. At last, Lord Vishnu became pleased by their penance and appeared before them. Sage Kashyapa narrated the woeful tales of the deities and requested him to make Indra the Lord of all the three worlds. Lord Vishnu promised that he would take incarnation as Vamana. In course of time, Aditi became pregnant and ultimately gave birth to Lord Vamana. Lord Vamana appeared in the form of a 'Brahmchari'. He wore a deer--Skin and carried a stick and a 'mekhala' in both his hands. Lord Vishnu enquired the deities about the future course of action. The deities informed him that Bali was busy performing a yagya and he would not turn down any demand made to him because if he did so there was a fear of loosing all his virtues attained by the performance of the yagya.

Lord Vamana went to the oblation site where Bali was performing a yagya and demanded a small piece of land measured by his three steps. Bali agreed to meet the demand of his guest inspite of Shukracharya's warning. Bali resolved to donate land by holding holy water in his palm. Now, Lord Vamana abandoned his dwarfish form and appeared in a giant form. He measured the whole earth by his first step. Lord Vishnu then measured the whole sky by his second step. The helpless Bali agreed to donate all the three worlds to protect his vow. Ultimately, Lord Vishnu sent Bali to the Rasatala and thus Indra became the ruler of heaven once again.

SRI RAMA'S BIRTH

Describing about Sri Rama's incarnation Lord Mahadeva told Parvati —'Once, Swayambhuva Manu had expressed his desire of having Lord

Vishnu as his son to which Lord Vishnu had agreed. During Treta Yuga Manu manifested himself as Dasharath and Vishnu kept his promise by taking birth as his son—Sri Rama. Similarly, during Dwapar Yuga Manu was bom as Vasudev and Lord Vishnu kept his word by taking birth as his son—Krishna. After the completion of one thousand divine years, Manu will be born in the village of Sambhal as Harigupta and Vishnu will take birth as his son—'Kalki'.

Lord Shiva then continued with the incarnation of Sri Rama and said —'Sage Vishrava was the son of Pulasya and was married to Kekashi. Ravana and Kumbhakama were bom to the couple. Sage Vishrava also had a daughter named Shurpanakha and a virtuous son named Vibhishan.Ravana and Kumbhakarna did austere penance to please me (Lord Shiva). When I appeared before Ravana he requested the boon of immortality from me. After receiving the boon, Ravana became very arrogant and started tormenting the inhabitants of all the three worlds. The deities became scarred and took the refuge of Lord Vishnu. Lord Vishnu assured them that he would solve their problem by taking incarnation as Sri Rama.

Dasharath came from the lineage of Surya. He had three queens—Kaushalya, Sumitra and Kaikeyi. Once, Dasharath performed a Vaishnav Yagya with the objective of acquiring a son. Lord Vishnu appeared and assured him that he would take incarnation as Sri Rama in a short time. Lord Vishnu gave a bowl of divine kheer to Dasharath, which he distributed amongst his three queens. In course of time, Kaushalya gave birth to Sri Rama on the auspicious day of Chaitra-Navami. The deities and the sages rejoiced at his birth.

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SRI RAMA GROWS UP

Continuing with the tale of Sri Rama, Lord Mahadeva told Parvati—Dasharath requested Vashishtha to perform the Jatkarm Sanskar of Sri

Rama. In course of time Kaikeyi gave birth to Bharata—an incarnation of Panchajanya conch. Similarly, Sumitra gave birth to two sons—Lakshman and Shatrughan. Lakshman was the incarnation of Sheshnag while Shatrughan was the incarnation of Sudershan chakra. Sri Rama and his brothers received education under the guidance of Sage Vashishtha. In a very short time they became proficient in all the scriptures and mastered various weaponaries. Although all the four brothers were very close to each other, yet Lakshman could not bear to live in Rama's separation even for a moment and was specially close to him.

Sita manifested herself from the field while Janaka was ploughing it. King Janaka brought up Sita with great love and care. At that time, Vishwamitra was busy performing a grand yagya at Siddha Ashrama. But the demons created numerous problems and made it impossible for him to accomplish the yagya. Vishwamitra went to Ayodhya and requested Dasharath to send Sri Rama and Lakshman along with him so that the yagya could be accomplished without any problems. Dasharath agreed to send Sri Rama and Lakshman along with Vishwamitra.This way, Vishwamitra returned to his hermitage acompanied by both the brothers. Garuda presented a pair of bow and imperishable set of arrows to both the brothers.

While staying at the hermitage Sri Rama and Lakshman killed many demons like Taraka and Subahu. When Marich tried to disrupt the yagya, Sri Rama attacked him with Pavan-astra, which sent Marich flying across the sea-shore. Meanwhile, on learning that Janaka was performing Vajapeya yagya at Janakapur, Vishwamitra took Sri Rama and Lakshman to attend it. On the way Sri Rama liberated Ahalya who had turned into a rock after being cursed by her husband. After reaching Janakapur, Sri Rama broke Lord Shiva's bow and married Sita. Lakshman married Urmila. Dasharath had come to attend the marriage ceremony accompanied by Bharata and Shatrughan. Bharata was married to Mandavi while Shatrughan married Shrutkeerti.

Meanwhile, on learning that Sri Rama had broken Shiva's bow, Parshurama arrived there and challenged him, but ultimately Parashurama realized about the divinity of Sri Rama and accepted his superiority. At last, Sri Rama, Lakshman, Bharata and Shatrughan returned to Ayodhya along with their respective consorts.

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SRI RAMA'S EXILE

Lord Mahadeva continued with the tale of Sri Rama and told Parvati — Dasharath wanted to appoint Sri Rama as his successor but Kaikeyi did

not like this idea. She wanted Bharata to be made the king of Ayodhya and Sri Rama to be sent into exile for 14 years. Once, Kaikeyi had saved Dasharath's life while he was fighting a battle against the demons. To show his gratitude, Dasharath had promised two boons to her. At that time, Kaikeyi had told Dasharath that she would make her demand at the appropriate time.

This way, Dasharath was compelled by Kaikeyi to accept the two demands. As a result, Sri Rama was sent into exile. Bharata refused to become the king of Ayodhya and vowed to wait till Sri Rama returned. Dasharath could not bear the sorrow of Rama's separation and died in his sorrow. Bharata tried his best to convince Sri Rama to change his mind and accept the throne, but Sri Rama did not listen to his request. Bharata then brought Sri Rama's wooden-sandal and kept it on the throne. He vowed to spend rest of his life in austerities till Sri Ramaretumed.

While Sri Rama was still in exile, he went to the hermitage of Sage Atri and received his blessings. Atri's wife- Anasuya preached Sita on the virtues of chastity. Sri Rama also visited hermitages of some other prominent sages like Sharbhanga, Suteeksha, Agastya etc. Once, while Sri Rama was living in Panchavati, Shurpanakha arrived there. Shurpanakha was Ravana's sister and wanted to marry Sri Rama, But Lakshman severed her nose and ears. She went to a mighty demon named Khar and narrated her woeful tale. Khar attacked Rama with a huge army, which comprised of brave warriors like Trishira Dushan etc. Rama was Victorious in this battle and Khar, Trishira and Dushan were killed.

Shurpanakha went to Ravana and informed him about the misdeeds of Rama. Ravana was infuriated and wanted to take revenge. He abducted Sita with the help of Marich.When Jatayu saw Ravana carrying Sita to Lanka, he fought with valiance but was injured in the ensuing battle. Sri Rama went in search of Sita and met Jatayu, who was injured and who informed Rama that Sita had been abducted by the demon king Ravana. Sri Rama met Hanuman at the Rishyamook mountain. Later on he befriended Sugriva on the advice of Hanuman. Sugriva had enemity with his brother-Bali. Sri Rama killed Bali and made Sugriva the king.

Sri Rama requested Hanuman to find out the whereabouts of Sita. Hanuman went to Lanka and found Sita at Ashoka Vatika. He destroyed

the garden and killed many demons including Ravana's son—Akshay Kumar. Ultimately, he was captured by Meghnath and taken to Ravana's court. Ravana ordered Hanuman's tail to be ignited. Hanuman then burnt the city of Lanka and returned to Sri Rama. When Sri Rama came to know about the exact location of Sita, he decided to attack Lanka with a huge army, which comprised of monkeys. The army camped at the seashore where Vibhishan came to meet him.

A bridge was built across the ocean and the army reached Lanka. A fierce battle took place in which many demons were killed. At last, Ravana came forward to fight against Sri Rama but was killed. Sri Rama appointed Vibhishan as the king of Lanka and blessed him. Vibhishan presented his pushpak Vimana to Sri Rama. All of them boarded the Pushpak Vimana and flew towards Ayodhya. On the way Sri Rama met Bharata who was still awaiting his arrival at Nandigram. Sri Rama was very pleased to meet Bharata. Ultimately all of them returned to Ayodhya.

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SRI RAMA'S CORONATION

Describing the coronation of Sri Rama Lord Mahadeva told Parvati—
People of Ayodhya rejoiced at the return of Sri Rama. An auspicious day

was chosen for his coronation and Sri Rama became the king of Ayodhya amidst the chantings of Vedic mantras. Sri Rama ruled over Ayodhya for one thousand years without any problem. Meanwhile, some ignorant people started pointing out fingers at the character of Sita. Sri Rama decided to abandon Sita in the forest to quell the rumour. Sita was pregnant at that time. Feeling pity on her condition, Valmiki took her to his hermitage where Sita gave birth to Lav and Kush.

Meanwhile Sri Rama decided to perform Ashwamedha Yagya at the bank of river Gomati. But, since the yagya could not have been accomplished without Sita, therefore he performed the rituals seated beside a golden idol of Sita. In the mean time Valmiki arrived there, accompanied by Sita. He requested Sri Rama to accept Sita, vouching for her chastity. Sri Rama told Valmiki-'I am confident of Sita's chastity but she will have to prove her chastity for the satisfaction of common people.'

Sita was deeply hurt by Sri Rama's unkind remarks. She said—'May mother earth swallow me if I ever had thought about any man other than my lord Sri Rama.' Hardly had Sita finished her lines than the earth cracked and Sita vanished into that crevice. Sri Rama's heart was filled with remorse but thinking that it was perhaps in his destiny to live in separation with Sita, returned to Ayodhya accompanied by Lav and Kush. In course of time, Kaushalya, Sumitra and Kaikeyi left for heavenly abode. Sri Rama continued to rule Ayodhya for 10,000 more years.

One day, Kala (death) arrived and reminded Sri Rama that the time had arrived for him to leave his mortal body. Meanwhile Lakshman became aware of Sri Rama's decision of leaving his mortal body. He gave up his life by taking samadhi in river Saryu. Sri Rama could not bear the sorrow caused by Lakshman's bereavment. He appointed Lav and Kush as the kings of Dwarawati and Kushawati respectively and decided to leave for heavenly abode. Sri Rama entered the water of river Saryu, flowing at the distance of three yojans fromAyodhya.

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SRI KRISHNA

Parvati requested Lord Mahadeva to narrate the divine tales of Vasudeva Krishna. Lord Mahadeva replied—Vasudev was the descendant of yadu.

His father was Devameedha. He was married to Devaki—the daughter of Ugrasena.Ugrasena also had a mighty son named Kansa. Kansa was extremely affectionate towards his sister Devaki. After her marriage, while Devaki was going to her husband's house on a chariot being driven by Kansa, suddenly a heavenly voice was heard.

'Kansa, you would meet death at the hands of Devaki's eighth son.'

Kansa became very scarred and wanted to kill his sister then and there. But, Vasudev requested Kansa to spare Devaki's life and promised to hand over any child that she gave birth to. Thus Kansa imprisoned both Vasudev and Devaki.In course of time, Devaki gave birth to seven sons and Kansa killed each of them. Lord Sri Hari manifested himself when Devaki conceived for the eighth time. It was the month of Shravana and the day was 'Krishna-ashtami' when Sri Hari took his incarnation at midnight. Soon after taking his incarnation he gave a glimpse of his divine form to Vasudev and Devaki. On the instruction of Sri Hari, Vasudeva carried the infant to Nand's house. He had no problem in moving out of the prison as all the guards had fallen asleep due to the illusion of Sri Hari.

On seeing the swift currents of overflooded yamuna, Vasudev became worried. But the level of river Yamuna receded as soon as Sri Krishna touched the river with his feet. Sheshnag protected Sri Krishna from heavy rain with his thousand hoods. When Vasudev reached Nand's house he found that Nand's wife— Yashoda had given birth to a baby girl. Yashoda was sleeping at that time and Vasudev had no problem in exchanging Sri Krishna with that baby girl. Vasudev then returned to the prison and laid down the baby girl beside Devaki.

The baby-girl started crying and the guards immediately woke up. They informed Kansa about the birth of Devaki's eighth child. Kansa tried to kill that baby girl by smashing her head, but she escaped from his hands and flew up in the sky. She thundered—'Your death is certain as your assasin has already taken birth.' Kansa was terrified at the prospect of his death. He instructed his soldiers to kill all the infants' whereever they were to be found in his kingdom. He also ordered the release of Vasudev and Devaki, as there was no point keeping them in captivity. Meanwhile, Sri Krishna grew up under the guardianship of Nand and Yashoda.

One day Kansa sent a wicked ogress named Putna to kill Sri Krishna. Putma had applied poison on her breasts and tried to kill Krishna by breast-feeding him. Sri Krishna sucked her breast with such ferocity that she died. Thus, Sri Krishna gave the first glimpse of his divinity to the inhabitants of Vajra. Sri Krishna accomplished many such divine deeds during his childhood. He grew up to be a mischieveous child and used to play numerous pranks on the fellow Gopis. He used to steal their butter and curd. One day, all the Gopis complained to Yashoda about Sri Krishna's misdeeds. Yashoda became angry and tied him with a wooden-mortar in order to prevent him from troubling the Gopis. She then placed that mortar between two trees so that Krishna could not move. But, Sri Krishna toddled away uprooting both the huge trees.

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Once, a demon named Bakasur disguised himself as a huge heron and tried to kill Sri Krishna. But, Sri Krishna hit him with a stone with such force that he met an instant death. This way Sri Krishna had killed many ferocious demons while he was still a small child. Some of them well

Kaliya—the serpent etc, Dhenukasur, Arisht, Keshi etc. A significant incident had occurred during Krishna's childhood. People of Vraja were devotees of Indra and used to worship him. Sri Krishna stopped this tradition and encouraged people to worship Govardhan mountain. Indra became extremely furious and caused incessant rain for one week. Sri Krishna protected the people by lifting Govardhan mountain and shielding them from the continuous downpour. At last, Indra accepted defeat and eulogized Sri Krishna.

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KILLING OF KANSA

Continuing with the divine tales of Sri Krishna, Lord Mahadeva told Parvati—When Kansa failed in his repeated attempts to kill Sri Krishna,

he instructed 'Akrura' to invite both Krishna and Balarama to Mathura on the pretext of attending a ceremony called Dhanush-yagya. Kansa had planned to kill Sri Krishna by deceitful means. A kr ura was a great devotee of Sri Krishna and was aware of Kansa's evil intentions. But, he had no other option but to follow the command of his master Kansa. So, A kr ura went to Vraja where Sri Krishna and Balarama used to live.

Sri Krishna and Balarama were delighted to meet Akrura. After the formal exchange of pleasantaries, Krishna took A kr ura to his home. A kr ura conveyed the instructions of Kansa to Nanda and requested him to send both Sri Krishna and Balarama to Mathura. Akrura said—'Sri Krishna is the incarnation of Lord Vishnu and Kansa will be killed by him.'Nanda and Yashoda were reluctant to send Sri Krishna to Mathura but Sri Krishna convinced them, Ultimately. A kr ura returned to Mathura accompanied by Krishna and Balarama. The people of Vraja became sad when the time for Krishna's departure to Mathura arrived.

When A kr ura reached Mathura accompanied by Sri Krishna and Balarama it was already evening. Sri Krishna saw a dyer with colourful apparels going towards Kansa's palace. Sri Krishna playfully demanded some set of clothes from that dyer which he refused to give. Sri Krishna was infuriated and slapped him so hard that he started vomiting blood. In a short time the dyer was dead. Sri Krishna and Balarama chose some beautiful set of clothes for themselves and proceeded towards the palace of Kansa. After sometime they met a crooked woman carrying 'sandal-wood-paste'. Sri Krishna demanded some sandal wood paste from her, which she gave without any hesitation. Sri Krishna blessed that crooked woman as a result of which she was cured of her physical—deformity.

At last, both Sri Krishna and Balarama reached the oblation—site where 'Dhanush-yagya' was suppossed to be performed. Sri Krishna lifted the divine bow kept there and broke it into two pieces. When Kansa learnt that the divine bow had been broken, he ordered Chanur to kill Krishna in a wrestling-bout. Kansa also fortified his palace by positioning wild elephants and mighty warriors at all the entrance-points. Sri Krishna and Balarama spent the night at the oblation-site. In the morning both of them proceeded towards the palace. Sri Krishna found an elephant named Kuvalyapeeda standing at the main entrance of the palace. He killed that ferocious elephant without much difficulty.

Sri Krishna and Balarama then entered the gymnasium where wrestling-bouts were supposed to take place. All the demons those who had witnessed Sri Krishna killing that huge elephant without any problem, became terrified and fled away from the gymnasium. Sri Krishna and Balarama entered the chamber of Kansa. Kansa became terrified and ordered his trusted lientenants—Chanur and Mushtik to kill Krishna.Chanur confronted Sri Krishna while Mushtik fought a duel with Balarama. Ultimately, both the demons were killed after a fierce duel. Now, Kansa was left all alone, Sri Krishna pulled Kansa from the throne where he was sitting and slapped him so hard that he fell down on the ground. The injury proved to be fatal and as a result Kansa died. Balarama also killed Kansa's younger brother whose named was Sunama.

After killing Kansa, Krishna and Balarama went to meet their parents—Vasudev and Devaki. They also freed their maternal grandfather-Ugrasena who had been imprisioned by Kansa. At last they appointed Ugrasena as the king of Mathura.

KILLING OF KANSA

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JARASANDH

Jarasandh was the father-in-law of Kansa. When he learnt about Kansa' death he surrounded Mathura with a huge army. Sri Krishna was well

aware of Jarasandh's might and bravery. He was also convinced that it would not be easy to defeat Jarasandh. So, he remembered Daruk—his eternal charioteer and sought his help. Daruk appeared with a divine chariot named Sugriva— pushpak. The chariot was well armed with all the divine weapons of lord Vishnu.

Sri Krishna and Balarama then entered the battlefied mounted on that divine chariot. A fierce battle was fought between Sri Krishna and Jarasandh's army. Jarasandh covered Krishna chariot with his various weapons but Sri Krishna destroyed them with his 'Chakra'. Sri Krishna then destroyed Jarasandh's army by showering volley of arrows from his famous bow—Sharang. Seeing the death and destruction in his army, Jarasandh came forward to fight Balarama.

Balarama attacked Jarasandh with his dangerous weapon—Hala (plough) and destroyed his chariot. Jarasandh fell down on the ground and as Balarama was about to kill him Sri Krishna requested Balarama not to kill Jarasandh. After being defeated, Jarasandh sought the help of Kalyan, who had a large army. Kalyavan agreed to help Jarasandh and surrounded Mathura with his army.

Realizing that Mathura was no longer a safe place to live, Sri Krishna shifted the whole population of Mathura to Dwarka and went to fight Kalyavan. The battle continued for a long period and after realizing that it was not easy to defeat his enemy, Sri Krishna, ran towards the cave where 'Muchkund' had been sleeping since many past eras. Muchkund was blessed with a boon according to which any person upon whom he put his glance after waking from his sleep would die. Krishna hid himself behind Muchkund. Kalyavan, who was chasing Krishna, entered the cave and kicked Muchkund. Muchkund opened his eyes and saw Kalyavan. Kalyavan was burnt to ashes. This way, Sri Krishna was able to defeat his powerful enemy by his cleverness.

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ABDUCTION OF RUKMINI

Lord Mahadeva told Parvati— When Jarasandh learnt about Kalyavan's death, he attacked Balarama to avenge his friend's death. But, very soon

he realized that it was beyond his capacity to defeat Balarama, so he retreated alongwith his army. Sri Krishna and Balarama returned to Dwarka.In course of time, Balarama married Revati—the daugher of Raivat. At that time, there ruled a king named Bhismak. He ruled over Vidarbha. He had a beautiful daughter named Rukmini. He also had many sons among whom Rukmi was prominent.

Rukmi wanted Rumini to get married to Shishupal much against her wishes. Rukmini being an incarnation of goddess Lakshmi rightly wanted o have Sri Krishna as her husband. Rukmini sent a message to Sri Krishna about her brother's intention. Sri Krishna went to help her, accompanied by Balarama. Sri Krishna reached Vidarbha on the same day, Rukmini was supposed to marry Shishupal and abducted her to Dwarka. Jarasandh and Rukmi chased Krishna's chariot but Balarama defeated Jarasandh while Sri Krishna fastened Rukmi with the chariot. Sri Krishna also shaved off Rukmi's hair, which filled him with so much of shame that he decided not to return to Vidarbha.After reaching Dwarka, Sri Krishna married Rukmini on an auspicious day.

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SRI KRISHNA'S QUEENS

Continuing with the divine tales of Sri Krishna, Lord Mahadeva told Parvati—Sri Krishna had 16 thousand queens among whom Satyabhama,

Kalindi, Mitravinda, etc. were prominent. King Sattajit had a priceless diamond named—Syamantak, which he had presented to his younger brother—Prasena. Sri Krishna was fascinated by that diamond and demanded it from Prasena, which he refused to part with.

One day, Sri Krishna alongwith Prasena and other Yadavas went into the forest for hunting. While chasing a deer, Prasena seceded from his group and was killed by a lion. The lion took the diamond and started playing with it. Incidentally, Jambavan—who had once fought along with Sri Rama against Ravana, saw the lion playing with the diamond. He killed that lion and took the diamond in his possession.

When Sri Krishna returned to Dwarka, he was surprised by a strange rumour, which pervaded the whole city. Some people suspected that Sri Krishna had killed Prasena for the diamond. Sri Krishna was very much distributed by this baseless rumour. To clear the doubts, he went into the forest accompanied by all the residents of Dwarka and showed the dead body of Prasena, which was still lying there. When people saw the mutilated corpse of Prasena, which bore marks of the lion's claws and canines, they became convinced of Sri Krishna's innocense.

While returning back to Dwarka, Sri Krishna saw an effulgent cave. Sri Krishna was very surprised and wanted to find out the source of light. He entered the cave and saw Prasena's diamond hanging on top of a cradle, in which a child was lying. A woman was singing a lulaby so that the child falls asleep—'The lion killed Prasena while Jambavan killed the lion and acquired this diamond from its possession. O child! Don't cry as this priceless diamond belongs to your father.'Sri Krishna furiously blew his conch. Jambavan came out from the cave after listening to the sound of the conch. A fierce duel took place between them, which continued for ten days. At last, Jambavan realized that the person against whom he was fighting was none other than Sri Rama himself. Jambhavan then gave his daughter—Jambavati to Krishna in marriage and gave lot of wealth as dowry including that 'Syamantak' diamond. Bhadraraj had three daughters—Sulakshamana, Nagnajiti and Susheela. Sri Krishna had married all three of them in a 'Swayamwara'. This way, Sri Krishna had altogether eight prominent queen consorts— Rukmini, Satyabhama, Kalindi, Mitravinda, Jambavati, Nagnajiti, Sulakshamana and Susheela.

There lived a mighty demon named Narakasur. He had defeated the deities and snatched the divine earrings of Aditi—the mother of deities. He had created an aerial city in which he lived alongwith other demons. The deities went to Sri Krishna and sought his help. Sri Krishna flew up in the sky mounted on the back of Garuda. Satyabhama was also accompanying him. Sri Krishna was amazed to see the well fortified palace of Narakasur. When the demons saw Srikrishna, they attacked him but Sri Krishna challenged them by blowin his conch. Narakasur came forward to fight Sri Krishna. A fierce battle took place in which Sri Krishna broke Narakasur's bow with his arrows. Ultimately, Sri Krishna was successful in killing Narakasur.

Sri Krishna then returned the whole wealth to the deities, which Narakasur had looted from them. He also liberated sixteen thousand women whom Narakasur had imprisoned. After being liberated all the women accepted Sri Krishna as their husband.

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ANIRUDHA MARRIES USHA

Lord Mahadeva continued with the divine tales of Sri Krishna—O Parvati! Sri Krishna had a son from Rukmini whose name was 'Aniruddha'.

Aniruddha was very brave and had killed a demon named Shambasur. There is an interesting tale how Aniruddha married Usha.

Once, Usha—the daughter of Banasur, saw a very handsome young man in her dreams. She was so infatuated by his handsome personality that she developed a deep desire of marrying him. When she woke up next morning, she expressed her desire to her companion—Chitralekha. Chitralekha was an accomplished painter. She drew a sketch of a handsome man as per the descriptions of Usha. When the painting was ready, Chitralekha revealed to Usha that the preson who she had seen in her dream was none other than Aniruddha.

Chitralekha had divine powers. She went to Dwarka and abducted Aniruddha while he was asleep. She then carried Aniruddha and laid him on the bed of Usha. When Usha woke up, she was thrilled to see the man of her dreams. Aniruddha remained there for many days without Banasur being aware of his presence. One day, Banasur came to know about Aniruddhas' presence. He became furious and imprisoned Aniruddha. Sage Narada informed Sri Krishna about Aniruddha's imprisonment. Sri Krishna went to fight a battle against Banasur and release Aniruddha from his imprisonment. Although Sri Krishna was leading a large army and was accompanied by mighty warriors like Baldeva and Pradyumna yet he was aware that it was not easy to fight Banasur who had one thousand arms and whom Lord Shiva had vowed to protect.

A fierce battle commenced between the armies of Sri Krishna and Lord Shiva. The battle remained indecisive for a long time. Meanwhile, Banasur came forward to fight against Sri Krishna. Very soon Sri Krishna severed all the thousand hands of Banasur with his 'chakra'. Lord Shiva then requested Sri Krishna to spare Banasur's life and said -'Banasur has received the boon of immortality from me. Now, only you can protect the dignity of my boon given to him.' Sri Krishna spared Banasur's life. Banasur then agreed to marry his daughter to Aniruddha. This way Aniruddha married Usha with great fanfare.

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THE DECLINE OF YADU DYNASTY

Parvati was listening to the divine tales of Sri Krishna with rapt attention. Lord Mahadeva told Parvati— 'Paundrak was the king of Kashi. He did an

austere penance for twelve years to please me. When I appeared before him, he requested me to make his appearance look like Sri Krishna. I blessed him with an appearance similar to that of Sri Krishna. People became confused as to who the real Krishna was.

One day, Narada arrived at Kashi and castigated Paundrak by saying that his intention of befooling people would not meet success as long as real Krishna was alive. Paundrak went to Dwarka with a large army and challenged Sri Krishna for a duel. Sri Krishna severed the impersonator's head with his chakra. Meanwhile, Jarasandh continued to torment the yadavas. Sri Krishna decided to settle the matter for once and all. He advised Bhima to challenge Jarasandh for a wrestling-bout.

Jarasandh and Bhima fought valiantly for 27 days. While both of them were fighting, Sri Krishna signalled Bhima to tear apart Jarasandh's thighs. After the killing of Jarasandh, Sri Krishna released all the kings who had been imprisoned by him. After the great war of Mahabharata had ended, Yudhisthira decided to perform a Rajasuya-yagya at Indraprashth. Sri Krishna also went there to bless the Pandavas. Shishupal was also present at the ceremony. He had an old grudge against Sri Krishna and started abusing him. Initially Krishna tried to overlook his abuses but when situation went beyond repair Sri Krishna severed his head with his chakra.

Dantavaktra attacked Mathura to avenge the death of Shishupal. A long battle was fought at the bank of river yamuna, which continued for many days. Ultimately, Sri Krishna was successful in killing Dantavaktra with his mace. There was a childhood friend of Sri Krishna whose name was Sudama. He was a poor brahmin. Once, he went to meet Sri Krishna. Sri Krishna, being an incarnation of the almighty immediately understood the precarious situation his poor friend was living in. He blessed Sudama as a result of which he got rid of his poverty and became prosperous. Sri Krishna had one crore sons from his sixteen thousand queens. Pradyumna was his eldest son. The Yadavas dominated the whole earth and had become arrogant after being intoxicated by their power. There is an interesting tale how this powerful Yadava dynasty met their downfall —

Once, some young Yadavas played a prank with Sage Kanva, which

caused the downfall of the Yadavas. One day, some Yadva children went at the bank of river Narmada where sage Kanva was doing penance. Samba was one of those Yadava children. He disguised himself as a pregnant woman by keeping a pestle under his clothes. All the Yadava children then went near Sage Kanva and asked him as to when was the pregnant woman supposed to deliver a child. Sage Kanva furiously cursed them that the whole clan of Yadavas would be liquidated because of that very pestle. All the children were scarred and told Sri Krishna about the mistake they had made. Sri Krishna ordered that the iron pestle be crushed to powder and be thrown into a pond. But, that was not the end of the matter, as long reeds grew all around the pond. The reeds had very sharp edges. A fish swallowed a small part of that iron pestle and was subsequently caught by a fowler, who retrieved that iron-piece from the fish and fixed it on the top of his arrow.

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Once, some young Yadavas played a prank with Sage Kanva, which caused the downfall of the Yadavas. One day, some Yadva children went at the bank of river Narmada where sage Kanva was doing penance. Samba was one of those Yadava children. He disguised himself as a pregnant woman by keeping a pestle under his clothes. All the Yadava children then went near Sage Kanva and asked him as to when was the pregnant woman supposed to deliver a child. Sage Kanva furiously cursed them that the whole clan of Yadavas would be liquidated because of that very pestle. All the children were scarred and told Sri Krishna about the mistake they had made. Sri Krishna ordered that the iron pestle be crushed to powder and be thrown into a pond. But, that was not the end of the matter, as long reeds grew all around the pond. The reeds had very sharp edges. A fish swallowed a small part of that iron pestle and was subsequently caught by a fowler, who retrieved that iron-piece from the fish and fixed it on the top of his arrow.

In course of time all the Yadavas developed enemity among themselves and killed each other with those sharp-edged reeds. Once, Sri Krishna was taking rest under the shade of 'Kalpa' tree. The fowler mistook his pink foot to be that of a deer and pierced it with his arrow. When the

fowler arrived at the spot he found Sri Krishna in an injured condition. The fowler regretted his action and begged for Sri Krishna's pardon. Sri Krishna consoled the fowler by saying that he had committed no crime. Meanwhile, Daruk arrived there on his chariot. Sri Krishna instructed Daruk to call Arjuna as soon as possible. Arjuna arrived at the site within a short time. Sri Krishna told Arjuna—'The time for my final departure has arrived. Please call all my eight queen consorts.'

Arjuna rushed towards Dwarka to summon the queens but Sri Krishna had already left for his heavenly abode before he could come back with the queens. Arjuna informed the queens about Sri Krishna's injury. In a short time the news spread like a wild fire and all the residents of Dwarka rushed towards the site of incident. After reaching there, the eight queens of Krishna found that their beloved husband had already departed. All of them gave up their lives and united with Sri Krishna. The great Yadavas like Vasudev, Ugrasena and Akrura followed suit. Balarama could not bear the sorrow caused by Sri Krishna's separation and he gave up his life. His wife-Revati entered the burning pyre with her husband's body in her lap. Similarly all the rest of Sri Krishna's family members like Rukmi's daughter, Pradyumna, Usha and Aniruddha left for heavenly abode.

Arjuna performed the last rite of all the dead Yadavas. Eventually, Dwaraka got submerged into the ocean. Thus, Sri Krishna after having liberated the earth from all the sinners left his mortal body. After completing his story Lord Mahadeva told Parvati that Sri Krishna takes incarnation whenever there is predominance of sin or sinners. He also revealed to her that Sri Krishna would incarnate as Kalki at the fag end of Kali Yuga to liquidate the'mlechchhas'.

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RITUALS OF VISHNU WORSHIP

Describing about the rituals connected with the worship of lord Vishnu, lord Mahadeva told Parvati— A devotee can worship Lord Vishnu by

making his idol. This mode of worship is known as 'Sthapita' (installation of an idol). There are also some sacred places related with lord Vishnu which are called 'Swayam-Vyakata' (self manifested) like Indradyumna Sarovar, (Kurma sthan), Kashi, Prayag, Dwarka, Naimisharanya, Mathura etc. In all these holy places, Lord Vishnu had manifested himself. A devotee should get up early in the morning and perform 'achaman'. He should then chant the holy name of Lord Vishnu. He should take his bath and sit down to worship Lord Vishnu.

A devotee should install idols of Lakshmi-Narayana on a beautiful pedestal and adorn it with flowers. He should then make offerings of various articles like akshat, fruits, flowers, etc. to the deity. While worshipping, it is most necessary that a devotee followes the rituals as mentioned in the ancient scriptures like Shruti, Smriti, Vedas etc. He should chant the shlokas of Purusha-Sukta as well as the cryptic mantra for the accomplishment of 'Shodashopachar'. He should light a ghee lamp and make offerings of articles like camphor and betel leaves to Lord Vishnu. While making offerings in the sacrificial-fire, chanting of a shloka either from Purushasukta or Srisukta is mandatory.

There are some specific days which are considered to be specially auspicious for the worship of lord Vishnu—Amavasya, Saturday, solar eclipse, lunar eclipse etc.

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LORD VISHNU-THE ALMIGHTY GOD

Describing about the superiority of Lord Vishnu among the trinity Gods' Sage Vashishtha narrated the following tale—During ancient times,

Swayambhuva manu had once gone to Mandarachal mountain to perform a yagya. Many scholars and learned men had come to attend that yagya. Very soon, they got into a debate as to who was the supreme among all the deities. Some of them eulogised the greatness of Brahma, while some said that lord Shiva was the greatest of all the deities. Failing to come to any conclusion all of them requested Sage Bhrigu to find out as to who was the greatest among the trinity Gods.

Sage Bhrigu went to meet Lord Shiva at Kailash mountain. He saw Nandi standing guard at the main entrance. Sage Bhrigu arrogantly ordered Nandi to inform Lord Shiva of his arrival. Nandi refused to comply with Bhrigu's command. Sage Bhrigu cursed Lord Shiva by saying—Your master- Shiva, would bear the consequences of showing disrespect to me. From today onwards people would make offerings of forbidden articles to him.'

Sage Bhrigu then went to meet Lord Brahma. After reaching Brahmaloka, he made salutations to lord Brahma.Lord Brahma also did not give any respect to Sage Bhrigu and neglected him. Sage Bhrigu became furious and cursed Lord Brahma—'Being intoxicated by your Rajoguna, you have shown disrespect to me. From today onwards people will not worhsip you.' Sage Bhrigu then went to meet Lord Vishnu at his abode- Ksheersagar. He did not have any problem in reaching the place where Lord Vishnu was taking rest on Sheshnag, engrossed in his yoganidra. Goddess Lakshmi was pressing Vishnu's legs with total devotion. Sage Bhrigu kicked Lord Vishnu on his chest. Lord Vishnu woke up and seeing sage Bhrigu said—'O Great Brahmin! Your tender foot must have got hurt because of my chest, which is as hard as Vajra. How blessed I am to have been touched by a brahmin's foot.'

Lord Vishnu got up and eulogised Sage Bhrigu. This gesture of Lord Vishnu made Sage Bhrigu cry in joy. Now, he was convinced as to who was the supreme among all the three deities. Sage Bhrigu returned to Mandarachal mountain where all the sages were anxiously waiting for him. He declared—

'Lord Brahma is the possesser of Rajoguna, while Lord Shiva possesses tamoguna. Only Lord Vishnu is the proud possessor of Satvaguna and hence He is the supreme among all three of them.' After finishing his tale,

Sage Vashishtha told the sages that anybody who worships Lord Vishnu with complete faith and total devotion become liberated from all his sins. A devotee of Lord Vishnu attains to Vishnu Loka after his death.

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PARSHURAMA

Describing Lord Vishnu's incarnation as Parshurama, Lord Mahadeva told Parvati—Sage Jamadagni came from the lineage of Bhrigu. He had pleased Indra by his tremendous penance and received Surabhi cow in return. In course of time he married the daughter of king Renuk whose name was Renuka. A child was born to them, who was named 'Rama' by Sage Bhrigu. The child was also known as 'Jamadganya' because of Jamdagni.

After growing up, Rama became proficient in all the scriptures. He also mastered various weaponaries. One day, the king of Haihaya named Arjuna arrived at the hermitage of Jamadagni. Sage Jamdagni treated the king with due honor and respect. He presented numerous gifts to the king. Arjuna wanted nothing else but the Surabhi—cow from Sage Jamdagni which he was unwilling to part away with. Ultimately, Arjuna forcibly took away the divine cow. The cow was unwilling to go alongwith Arjuna and she attacked his army with her sharp horns. As a result, Arjuna's whole army was liquidated within no time. The revengeful Arjuna killed Jamadagni. At the time of this incident. Rama was not present in the hermitage.

Rama wanted to avenge his father's death and did a tremendous penance to please Lord Vishnu. Lord Vishnu became pleased by his devotion and presented many divine weapons to him. The weapons included the famous axe—Parshu and Vaishnav-bow. After acquiring Parshu from Lord Vishnu, Rama became famous as Parshurama. He had vowed to kill all the Kshatriyas, which he did only, the clan of Ikshavaku was spared by him as he had promised his mother that he would not harm Ikshavaku and his clan.

After freeing the earth from the terror of Kshatriyas, Parshurama performed an Ashwamedha Yagya and donated his whole kingdom, to the brahmins. He then went to do penance at the hermitage of Nar- arayan.